

The House of Joy

JO VAN AMMERS KÜLLER

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THE HOUSE OF JOY

THE HOUSE OF JOY

A STORY OF STAGE-LIFE
IN HOLLAND

BY
JO VAN AMMERS-KÜLLER

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH BY
H. VAN WYHE



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INTRODUCTION

MRS. JO VAN AMMERS-KÜLLER, almost unknown in England, enjoys in Holland a position comparable in eminence, though due to somewhat different qualities, with that of Miss Clemence Dane or of Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith.

The example of her work here presented in translation to the English reader, under the title of "The House of Joy," is a novel of the modern stage. It testifies to her lifelong interest in the theatre, an interest which has made her an inveterate playgoer in her own country and urged her during her brief visits to London, Paris, Vienna, and Prague, to matinée and evening performances on the same day lest anything worth seeing should escape her. Mistress of several languages, she is aware of every significant development in the dramatic and other literature of Europe and America, but her admiration is extended in a special degree to John Galsworthy and to Arthur Schnitzler. She is herself a distinguished dramatist, and while one of her plays, *Mijn and Dijn* ("Mine and Thine"), is amongst the most popular pieces on the Dutch stage, another, *Roeping* ("Vocation"), has had success in Germany, two others have been translated into English, and she seems destined to achieve an appropriately cosmopolitan reputation as a playwright.

Her early years were spent in the quaint and ancient town of Delft, where her father holds an important

civic position. Through her mother, she is related to a well-known Dutch military family, but is herself definitely anti-militarist in sympathy. It was at Delft, while still at a finishing school, that she wrote her first story. It was there, too, that she first met the gifted young engineer who later became her husband. For some time after marriage, Mrs. Jo van Animmers-Küller was absorbed in domestic concerns and the rearing of her two baby boys, and it was only when business took her husband to Russia that she turned seriously to writing. Delft, Leiden and The Hague yielded the settings of her longest and perhaps most famous novel, *Maskerade* ("Masquerade"). It was at Leiden that she began, though it was at Amsterdam that she finished, the remarkable book of which this is the translation. The sequel, which will shortly appear in English under the title of "Jenny Heysten's Career," proves that the author, who here gives a generalized picture of stage-life, can concentrate with still more effect on a single figure.

CHAPTER I

WHEN Jenny Heysten broke off her engagement to go on the stage, did she stake her future on the wrong card and gamble away her life's happiness, and am I thus responsible for the sorrows of her later years, I who helped to push her over the footlights? With Nico Maes' letter before me, his letter with its bitter reproach, this question persists in tormenting me.

It is true that my love for the stage, my spiritual interest and faith in a truly great and lofty theatre-craft, had encouraged Jenny to talk to me about that which in her family circle merely excited mockery or irritated astonishment, because I was the first to believe in her talent and thus the first to whom she was not ashamed of displaying it.

Suppose for a moment that my "pernicious" influence had never been exercised over her; is it probable that a temperamental child like Jenny would ever have developed into a busy domineering doctor's wife with the superior half of her thoughts concentrated upon a case of instruments and the other divided between her house-keeping and the half a dozen children with whom Nico as gynæcologist and man of principle, would undoubtedly have endowed her?

Long afterwards when I explained to Lucas Veraart that it was I who had discovered Jenny's talent, and had I not done so she would certainly have married Nico Maes, he laughed and declared that for his part,

he did not believe in the undiscovered genius—"some mute inglorious Milton." "A real talent always breaks its way through," he said, "and the other kind, the undiscovered, in my opinion, was never worthy of discovery."

Then I thought he was wrong; but now upon looking back, and reviewing all the facts in my heart I agree with him.

However that may be, the performance of "Marieke van Nimweghe," at my instigation, certainly became the turning-point in Jenny's life. Had it not been for the triumph of that evening, in love, and inexperienced as she then was, she would assuredly have married her charming, sport-loving Nico, even although afterwards she would most likely have developed into a nervous, restless, dissatisfied woman, and in the long run, some force, stronger than inclination or good intentions, might perhaps have driven her to desert husband and children "because true talent always breaks its own way through." And if so, no one could have blamed my influence as the cause, but everyone would then have asserted that in Jenny, as in pretty well all the Heystens, there had always been a kink.

It was a year and a half before the turning-point in question, after the Christmas holidays, at the beginning of 1913, that I entered her extraordinary family as a "paying guest."

Upon receiving the old-fashioned ceremonious note with the fine sloping writing, in which Mrs. Heysten offered me two large rooms and "a seat at our table," all the cheap and extravagant offers of boarding-house landladies were thrust aside.

How greatly that too, too familiar name excited my curiosity. Generations of Heystens, statesmen, ambassadors, pamphleteers, revolutionaries and poets, had been dinned into my ears, during my school days. It was a Heysten, I remembered, who had instigated the plot against the de Witts, a Heysten had been the first to hoist the red and blue flag when the prince of Orange landed in 1813. Another Heysten had offered Lord Leicester a refuge in our country. A Heysten it was who wrote a standard work on Vondel, and it is to a Heysten the last famous one of his line that Holland owes some of its present-day laws. I had hitherto always lived among people who had looked ahead and expected to find their happiness in the future, and it suddenly seemed to me of fantastic interest to have the opportunity of finding out what the life of this impoverished generation of an old patrician family was like from within, which in spite of unpaid bills and having to let rooms, would no doubt look down condescendingly upon a plebeian like myself, possessing neither family crest nor genealogical tree.

I answered Mrs. Heysten's letter, and with gracious condescension she agreed to receive me as her guest as though conferring upon me a royal favour; and I, imposed upon by the house like a palace, a sitting room without any sun, and a bedroom with a creaking bed, gratefully accepted. I never regretted it, however, not even during that first freezingly cold month of January, when I sat shivering by the stove which would not draw, and corrected exercise-books by the light of an evil-smelling oil-lamp. For the old, gigantic, impoverished house seemed still to be filled

with the glory of departed centuries. Each passage through its deadly-cold halls and lofty hollow rooms was a voyage of discovery. From every wall, at each bend of the rickety stairs, some unapproachable ruler's countenance gazed down at me—and was there not a history attached to every carved chest or ragged arm-chair? Even the kitchen stove possessed its legend, and the topmost attic its ghost.

In spite of my vaunted knowledge of human nature I had never imagined that in these sober and practical times such people as the Heystens still existed, these wonderful parents with their colourless, aristocratic faces, shabby clothes, princely manners and hide-bound conservatism, for whom the clock seemed to have stopped during half a century; while their children, frail, too slender, their strength outgrown, oversensitive, unbalanced, each according to his or her own inclination seeking some undefined foothold in life, seemed more like the offspring of a hyper-modern, decadent period.

There was Timon with his unnaturally high, white forehead from which the long, reddish silky hair was rigorously brushed back, with the soulful eyes of a prophet, a weak chin and a sensual, scarlet effeminate mouth, Timon who was by turns a theosophist, Christian scientist, communist-in-theory, for whom the over-worked general servant had to prepare every day a separate dish, because of his vegetarian principles. There was Philip, a cripple from birth, trying to hide his infirmity by joining in the same games as the other boys at school, thus exhausting himself, and reaching home too tired for any sort of hobby, showed himself merely a rude, disagreeable boy, always dis-

puting with his father and brother, and only according to his sister a rough sort of comradeship.

There were other children, the eldest son a lawyer in a small provincial town, whose career and cleverness the father was ever proudly extolling, who with a wife of equally exalted lineage and poverty, tried to uphold the glory of his race. There was also a daughter, who with a minimum of aristocratic prejudice and a maximum of good sense, had disregarded the Heysten tradition and married a wealthy Rotterdam margarine merchant with a cordial contempt for all pride of race, especially that of the ever-impecunious family of his wife. It was only later that I heard of two others, hopeless idiots, in an institution at Gheel, and of a little sister, a deaf-mute, who had died in infancy, and whose portrait and lock of hair Mrs. Heysten wore in a black locket set with pearls.

The Heysten children, the three who with their parents and myself, "the guest," sat daily at the family board, resembled their mother, whose family bore the same surname as her husband's, she being a near relative of his. She had brought no new blood into the ancient, anæmic race. Her children had all inherited her delicate, transparent complexion, the curve of the shoulders which always made them appear tired, her manner of listening with half-closed eyes, and her extraordinarily beautiful slim hands with tapering fingers.

But not one of them possessed her grand manner, her refined, courtly politeness, yet ever perceptible haughtiness. On the contrary, in each of the Heysten children there was an indecision, an almost submissive timidity as of those who have in youth experienced

care, sorrow and disillusion ; but in spite of her shabby, trained silk dresses, and her worm-eaten surroundings, Mrs. Heysten was never ridiculous, and even I, with my democratic principles, always in her haughty presence felt myself her inferior.

As she sat in the large, dim drawing-room with its three lofty, narrow windows looking on to the street, its rickety chairs, its almost threadbare carpet, a big embroidery frame in front of her, or with a year old magazine on her lap, she was like a heroine out of one of Charlotte Brontë's novels, while the little servant was wearing herself out working in the huge house, and Jenny was sitting upstairs somewhere, cobbling up the worst of the holes in her stockings with coarse thread.

And the manner with which she would motion me towards a chair, her languid smile when she questioned me about my day's experiences while pouring me out a cup of watery tea, drove back my thoughts to the time depicted in her painted portrait with its chignon, the gauzy, puffed sleeves and its double row of pearls, when she had been daily the admired and flattered hostess, and social doings in her town had been limited by the number of dinner-parties, great and small, given every year by "the Heystens."

The number of the dinners first diminished, then ceased altogether. It was seldom now that a visitor entered the drawing-room, and never an invited guest. The family possessions of centuries had, for the greater part, been sold or pawned after her stupid easy-going husband had gambled away the last vestige of his patrimony, and, with the help of friends, been set up as a wine merchant in a small way of business.

One was ever aware of her constant reproach for this, the most bitter indignity of her life, in the altitude from which Susanna Heysten looked down upon her weak, quiet husband; in the resigned patience with which she ignored his long, incoherent anecdotes, in the scornful little smile which sometimes momentarily flickered about her sensitive mouth when he poured himself out glass after glass of the wine of which "the business" still afforded him an unlimited supply. And although I never heard her give any order to her children without the injunction "your father wishes," and although he in the most courtly manner every evening carried her embroidery frame to the spot where she was sitting, the relationship between them always seemed to me to be rather that of an armistice than a marriage.

Why was Jenny's talent ever any source of astonishment to me? Why did I ever ask myself from whom in her ancient and aristocratic family she could possibly have inherited her gift of acting? Had not her mother, daily, for years on end, acted a most wonderful comedy which she kept up in all its finesse, even if one by one, the stage properties had gradually dropped away?

On looking back at that first winter in the Heystens' house and reviewing all my experiences, the scent of damp walls and smoking stoves, lavender, and mouldy, dusty Utrecht velvet seems once more to mount to my nostrils, and I see again the oval table in the dark dining-room, the identical table at which Louis Napoleon had once sat as guest, and the family which had accepted me as one of its household. And behind us, around us and above us, hovered the silent presence of those many others, a series of painted, unbending,

haughty, countenances, over which the shadows chased themselves, so that in the flickering light of the four candles on the table, they seemed to form part of our company.

When we went in to luncheon, following Mrs. Heysten's shabby but rustling train, we found standing beside the sideboard with its grim lions upholding the sculptured coat of arms, the rigid, motionless figure of a very old man. He had been a former man-servant, and was dragging out the remnant of his existence in the almshouse, and with an undeviating faithfulness, the motive for which my introspective socialism vainly tried to fathom, came every day to serve his old master and mistress. He was stiff with gout, very asthmatical, and his oppressed and wheezy breathing formed a lugubrious, continuous accompaniment to our conversation. But the manner with which his trembling hands put down the dishes was still immaculate, and his "Do you take wine or water, Madam?" seemed to partake of the solemnity of some religious rite. And while Mrs. Heysten with her grey, complicated, but untidy coiffure above her erect figure, presided at table and kept the conversation going with her short even sentences as though entertaining us all as guests, the old man in his almshouse livery, handed round the dishes with their scanty, ill-prepared contents as though they had formed part of a royal banquet. I can still see the meagre haddock reposing upon a huge dish of antique Delft, the bluish potatoes neatly placed upon a folded napkin, or the dried-up remains of meat, cut into unnaturally thin slices, spread out upon the silver platter, the only one left from the service which William V had bestowed

as a gift upon Godard Heysten, his chamberlain and privy-councillor.

At first our conversation almost always reverted to the past. The history of his race was the only feeling still acute in the worn-out, almost senile brain of the father, and it interested me far more than Mrs. Heysten's banal discourse about the weather or the novellette in her magazine. Each of my questions provoked an inexhaustible string of anecdotes and legends which acted as a spur to my vivid imagination when, the meal over, upstairs in my chilly sitting-room, my healthy appetite appeased with biscuits and chocolate, I sank deeply into my own soft arm-chair and listened to the mysterious creaking in the beams overhead, or the rustling as of someone moving behind the faded silk hangings. It was during those months that I conceived my first historical novel of which I made Amalia Heysten the heroine, while Amalia in a hooped satin skirt, holding an unnaturally big rose in her hand and with an equally unnaturally small Maltese spaniel at her feet, gazed down at me with her dark fanatical eyes from above the sculptured mantelpiece and held me in a more powerful charm of bygone and forgotten things, of echoing voices and dying footsteps, than I had ever hitherto experienced. Evening after evening, I sat dreaming in the quiet old room, until the clock in the church-tower close by recalled me to my corrections, or until Jenny entered bringing me some badly-made tea in a china cup of fantastic value.

At that time Jenny must have been about seventeen, but she looked no more than fifteen, was more like an undeveloped overgrown schoolgirl than a modern flapper, an unsightly little creature without a

grain of feminine vanity. No ribbon or ornament enlivened the commonplace, ill-cut grey frock, she never wore any but coarse grey stockings and hopelessly heavy shoes. Her hair, fine and reddish as was that of all the Heystens, had been cut short after typhoid fever, and was as unkempt as an untidy schoolboy's. The only effect of my being her mother's guest in addition to her class-mistress at college, was apparently to increase her shyness. At first, if I ever made the slightest allusion to the class, she would gaze at me with her large grey eyes full of annoyance, and when at dinner I tried to draw her into conversation about the college, although her answer would be invariably polite, it was such that I refrained from any further attempt at friendliness. I considered Jenny as by far the least interesting of the Heysten family. At school her work was very middling and she was so quiet and reserved that, had she not been one of my housemates, her little person would certainly not have excited the slightest attention from me. I don't recollect her ever having made an amusing or characteristic remark during school hours, or of giving any sign of interest in anything. It was my constant annoyance to find her always word-perfect at her lessons, and as I was imbued with the traditional mania of young teachers for discovering signs of character or slumbering genius, Jenny's platitudes on "Spring" or "A little Journey," which she mechanically copied into an untidy, blotted and dog-eared exercise-book, always rubbed me up the wrong way.

At college she used to try to hide herself behind the broad back of the youth in front of her; at home I only saw her at dinner-time when, like a naughty

child, she usually sat exchanging chaffing remarks with Philip. I left her severely alone, and after I had finished my talk with her father about his ancestors, would endeavour to arouse Timon from his self-absorption and attention to his bean-purée by questioning him about the Karma-worship of the Hindoos, or the Death-cult of the ancient Persians, and was amazed at the amount of unpractical book-learning amassed behind the high pale forehead of this boy, who failed in all his exams., and who was considered by his mother as "not all there."

My experience as teacher in that class was scarcely a pleasant one. My elderly predecessor, laden with the cargo of rules and exceptions, combined with a number of conventional theories as to the fame of Vondel, the immorality of Brederode, and the frivolity of Hooft, which she had persistently dinned into the ears of her pupils, had entirely annihilated any interest they might otherwise have been inclined to take in languages or literature.

I made despairing efforts to awaken in the dozen scholars including Jenny, the only girl among them, some feeling for beauty in the works of our great poets. In return they merely looked upon me, with my spiritual admiration for Brederode's "Book of Songs" or Hooft's "Legends," as a sentimental old maid.

To act as a spur to their meagre interest, I had replaced the sleepy reading-lesson on Tuesday afternoon by one in elocution, when I recited verses, culled chiefly from the moderns, in the same way as I myself had been taught by Lucas Veraart, and I tried to instil into my pupils something of what I felt of their wonderful rhythm and sound.

But all my good-will was damped by their hopeless indifference and fear of appearing ridiculous in the eyes of their merciless class-mates. In the end I lost patience. I forgot that my prestige in this form of almost grown-up youths was far from perfect, and gave vent to my indignation at their lack of any feeling for Beauty. "Imagine," cried I scornfully, "the fifth class of a college in which no one is able to recite a verse decently, where one after the other mumbles like children at a Sunday school."

I ceased breathless, suddenly realizing that of the three rows of faces turned towards me, one only wore an expression of amused astonishment, a couple looked foolishly confused, their mouths still open, while one, Jenny Heysten, sat gazing at the streak above the courtyard outside—yawning.

"But I've had about enough of it. Do you imagine I am doing this for my pleasure? Come get out your books," I continued in an icy tone, "I am going to dictate."

A pause. Silent amazement at such an unprecedented occurrence. Then suddenly, a sharp voice.

"Miss Schepp!" Maurice van Lier, a youth with a good-looking Jewish face and cunning black eyes, leant over his desk towards me. "Please don't give it up. I know someone who can recite just as well as you—Jenny Heysten can," he said, his eyes twinkling with malicious delight as he glanced from her back to me again.

Jenny, still occupied in staring vacantly at the grey sky, turned round with a start, and I observed that the blood left her cheeks while, forgetting her usual shy self-consciousness, she shouted furiously to the

youth: "It's not true! You're a beastly liar!" The whole class laughed, the youth grinned triumphantly at me.

"You just try her and see, Miss Schepp," he cried in his throaty voice. "She can recite verses right enough, any amount of them."

"It's not true!" repeated Jenny, hoarse with rage.

"It is though," he persisted, encouraged by the evident approval of the others.

I tried to command silence with the aid of my ruler. Under the unappeased annoyance of the whole afternoon, after feeling vaguely but surely that I was not as I desired and expected to be, clever and superior in the eyes of these youths, but on the contrary only a tiresome and somewhat silly class-mistress, the revelation of this artful boy caused me sudden satisfaction.

"Well then, Jenny Heysten, give us a demonstration of your talent," I commanded mockingly.

I shall never forget the glance of hatred and contempt with which Jenny punished her betrayer as, awkwardly leaving her desk with lingering footsteps and a purposely indifferent carriage, she passed through her class-mates to the scaffold.*

Seeing her stand thus in front of the platform, unattractive in her dowdy frock and heavy worn shoes, gazing at me with something of the trapped animal in her large grey eyes, I angrily subdued the unreasoning pity which threatened to overcome me. Surely it was no punishment to be allowed to recite a beautiful poem. In my former school the pupils

* Nickname for the school-platform in Holland.

had sought the opportunity, had considered it a distinction, not as an unjust trial.

"Well Jenny, I'm quite curious. About how many poems do you know?"

"Any amount of them," replied Jenny in a perfect imitation of van Lier's thick, Jewish accent, her nose in the air as she gazed at the lamp above her head.

The class roared. My first impulse was towards anger, my second to laugh with them. Restraining myself, however, I said calmly:

"Then of course you know the 'Iris,' which I recited for you just now?"

"O, yes, Miss Schepp!"

"Well, recite that."

For one second Jenny examined my face to see whether there might not still be some possibility of escape, then she carelessly turned up her nose, sniffed, and began—

"I was born from the rays of the sun,
And a sigh from the seething sea:
Which arose from the Main,
Upon wings of rain . . ."

"Better than the others at all events," was my conclusion after listening to the first few lines, then, weary and nervous after the afternoon's annoyance, I absently diverted my thoughts until suddenly awakened to the fact that the youths were no longer sitting as usual, stodgily indifferent; on the contrary most of them seemed to be exceedingly attentive, a few even looked somewhat abashed. In the last row, one was whispering behind his raised hand, while another was grinning and nudging his foolish-looking neighbour.

“ For deep in the sea,
Splits the channel in twain,
As my kiss doth irradiate the waves—”

It occurred to me that Jenny pronounced her consonants in a peculiar manner. I had never noticed her to pronounce S as Z or F as V exactly as I was in the habit of doing. How often Lucas Veraart had tried to correct me of this fault, which used to annoy him so much. With uncomfortable intuition I stole a glance at Jenny. There she stood quite undisturbed, but at the end of every line she gave her head a little shake and raised one of her eyebrows. She also made a stereotyped gesture of her right hand upon reaching any climax, obstinately pronouncing F as V while slurring each final S.

Suddenly I realized that Jenny was imitating me—my gestures—my faults—the slight defect in my speech, which I still vainly tried to conquer. Jenny was giving—a fact which had been at once recognized by the breathlessly enthralled class—a perfect imitation, a caricature of myself.

The blood rushed to my face with rage. How dared she? How dared that child, that mere flapper with her innocent expression be guilty of such gross impertinence? Thoughts of condign punishment surged within me. I would make an example of her. They should learn, all of them, these youths, too, giggling with amused red faces, that I was not to be trifled with. If they proved themselves to be no better than a lot of school-board children, then they should be treated as such. As to Jenny, I would send her to the Head-master at once, demanding that she be rusticated for at least a week. Father and Mother

Heysten, with their haughty mien and immaculate manners, should hear of their dear daughter's behaviour towards their guest.

"Leave the class at once and go to the Rector"—the stern command sprang to my lips, but was not uttered. The Rector. A vision of his shrewd, self-satisfied countenance under the silver hair arose before me. Certainly he was ever courteous and friendly, but some feeling had always seemed to lurk in the corner of his eyes since the day when, irritated by his conservative ideas, I had defended some hyper-modern theory with more heat than the occasion warranted. And after all I was the only woman-teacher at that college, and in the teachers' room I enjoyed this distinction the more because I had spent three barren years among mere women-workers. It was a privilege I should have been exceedingly sorry to forego.

The Rector would certainly punish Jenny, but the effect would be to make me appear hopelessly ridiculous during his future dignified inspections of the classes. If I caused Jenny to be expelled from my class, would that not be an incontestable proof of my own recognition of the excellence of her mimicry? Would not my anger and Jenny's consequent punishment cause the greatest satisfaction to these clumsy young blockheads?

"My hands are resting
Upon the uttermost coast
Of the earth, as in a rudderless dream—"

I have always felt an aversion from the "Iris" since that day. Trembling with anger, I waited until

Jenny had finished the apparently endless poem. The child's memory was really extraordinary; I could not detect a single error. When she had reached the end, I said "thank you" with calm indifference, as though nothing unusual had happened. One could almost feel the suspense hanging over the class.

"Do you want to hear anything else?" asked Jenny impertinently.

"No thank you," I said simply, but how I should have loved to have given her a good shaking!

That day, as luck would have it, the "general" whom Mrs. Heysten with "terminological inexactitude" was wont to describe as cook or housemaid, as occasion demanded, had taken French leave and departed bag and baggage, and old Adrian, even a trifle more breathless than usual, served up a bleeding piece of mutton and a greasy vegetable stew in which some almost raw parsnips were floating. When at the last moment Jenny appeared, hot and tired and with smuts on her nose, I understood that the preparation of the meal with its consequent saving of the situation had been entrusted to her, and I felt unreasoningly sorry for the child whom I knew to have extra home-work for that evening. So I determined to remit the imposition, which I had planned for her during my walk home. I had intended to say at dinner to Mrs. Heysten: "Are you aware of your daughter's great gifts of mimicry?" and then to Jenny: "Come, Jenny, recite the 'Iris' exactly as you did it for me in class this afternoon."

And then I should have waited to see how Jenny, who had an unbounded dread of her mother's dis-

pleasure, would have extricated herself from her dilemma.

It was a sinister meal. Even Mrs. Heysten's heroic attitude did nothing to mitigate the depressing atmosphere. Timon argued with Jenny because she had boiled meat in the vegetable stew, thus "poisoning" the meal for him, and she then drew upon herself a severe reprimand from her father when she answered Timon in the uncouth Scheveningen dialect of the departed "general." As I mounted the dark staircase with my nerves all on edge and suffering pangs of indigestion, I firmly made up my mind to leave these rooms. In spite of the glamour of their ancient name and race, these Heystens were quite impossible. The wonderful old house, always apt in the most unexpected manner to allure me afresh, could not be weighed in the balance against the comfort of a decent meal and a warm room in which to study. Of course no one has lighted the fire in my smoky stove to-day, I thought grimly to myself. A hundred gulden a month. After all, wasn't it absurd of me to bear all these discomforts so meekly?

But as I opened the creaking door, a satisfying warmth welcomed me upon the threshold, and as if by magic my feelings immediately changed. There are few things to which I am so susceptible as the charm of a glowing fire in a dark, silent room, and my stove, filled to the top with wood and coal, roared and crackled as it had never done under the slovenly management of the Scheveningen one and Mrs. Heysten's thrifty supervision. It was Jenny, I guessed as I threw myself into my deep chair with a feeling of well-being, and noticed that the little table with my

corrections, had been put within my reach, a footstool near, and the curtains carefully drawn. Jenny's bad conscience ; and, smiling to myself, I remembered the advice of a former English colleague in Rotterdam. "Always help yourself when you have any trouble with a tiresome child. Every time you seek aid from the parents or other authority, you lose some respect and affection. . . ."

It was long past the usual hour when Jenny brought me my tea that evening. She was wearing a dirty, blue overall, and her pale little face, clammy with heat, bore sharp signs of fatigue. Quickly and with noticeable timidity, she put down the blue Chinese cup upon my bureau and would have hastily slipped away, but as she reached the door, I detained her with words to which I had given much previous reflection, and to which with much calmness and emphasis I now gave utterance.

"By the way, Jenny, don't you agree with me that a poem like 'Iris' is too beautiful to be used as a medium for that easy little conquest of your classmates ? "

She did not grasp my meaning at once, but when she did, a bright flush mantled her pale cheeks, and she exclaimed indignantly : "It's not at all easy, it's frightfully difficult to imitate anyone ; I don't mean to make a caricature, but to make an exact reproduction."

This answer did not quite agree with my scheme for this conversation ; it also reawoke something of offence.

"I was very disappointed in you," said I sharply, "It's a very cheap sort of spite. I should have

thought a Heysten would have felt ashamed of holding anyone up to ridicule like that."

"It was not spite," she asserted at once.

"Why did you do it, then?"

Silence. I could hear Jenny's rapid breathing and the irritating sound of her biting one of her nails with her small, white teeth. Suddenly she acknowledged with a shy, painful little smile, "If I had done it properly as you wanted me to, they'd have made fun of me." This calm statement with its artless egotism put me off the scent.

"So it was self-preservation?" I concluded with scornful disbelief. "Had you ever recited properly for them, then?"

"For him." The words were uttered with difficulty and without looking at me. "For Maurice van Lier."

Suddenly all became clear. It was not so very long ago since I, too, sitting by a stream, or upon a seat in the woods, my head close to the fair or dark one of a boy, had whispered verses of Perk, Shelley, or de Musset, convinced that no one before us, had ever thoroughly grasped their full significance, and the time was still less since I had fought out with myself upon a pillow wet with tears, my first problem of life's short-sightedness. With sharp distinctness the scene of this afternoon arose before me. Maurice van Lier with his handsome face and triumphant throaty voice: "Miss Schepp, Jenny Heysten can do it just as well as you." And Jenny's glance of hate as, defenceless in the power of us both, she had walked up to the scaffold.

"Jenny," I said, "come here a moment and sit down on this stool."

She came slowly and sat down like a condemned prisoner, much more influenced by my sudden gentleness than by my reproach of the moment before, while I, the last remnant of my anger diverted by the uncontrollable desire to stroke the guilty, bent head with its short, ruddy hair, asked in the voice which I knew to be winning to children: "Was it you, who lighted my fire, and put everything ready for me?"

There was no answer. I felt the head upon which my hand still rested shake with sobs, and remembering that by this time the Heystens with their decayed splendour must have become accustomed to ridicule, I asked: "Would you really think it so dreadful, if those boys laughed at you for once?"

Jenny turned her tear-stained face towards me so that I could see, first astonishment, then fury in her eyes, as with trembling lips she exculpated herself.

"Oh, laugh? They've always done that, ever since we first went to that school, at Phil for being a cripple, Timon for wearing long curls, and at me, because I was always fetched by old Adrian, and was never allowed to go to tea at any child's house whose father kept a shop. Do you think we minded that; we Heystens? But when they ridicule anything you love, which is sacred to you, laugh because you are stirred through and through by it, so that it carries you quite out of yourself—ah, that is the most awful thing that can happen. It's as though—as though they were pricking you with red-hot needles, as though you were tied to a stake and they were spitting upon you—or as though you——"

"That's enough now," I exclaimed shaking her impatiently by the shoulder.

I could distinctly feel the trembling of her slight frame, could see how she had clenched her hands, her small face drawn with passion, while her eyes, those large, questioning child's eyes, had become pools of dark and unnatural depth. My calm and critical mind is nearly always incredulous and hostile towards excess of sentiment, and, as I was well aware from experience, no childish excitement could withstand the effect of my derision. But this depth of emotion in the hitherto apparently spiritless and untemperamental Jenny thrilled me as a psychological problem, and intuitively I again found the right words and tone with which to gain her confidence.

"But suppose there was someone capable of feeling it too, someone who could thoroughly understand your emotion—wouldn't it be a joy to talk about what you love and think so beautiful?"

Jenny's face relaxed; the fierce, sombre expression of her eyes melted as, gazing up at me with a velvety softness, she timidly brushed her wet cheek against my hand, which still rested upon her shoulder. And then, without another word of explanation, she suddenly began to recite the "Iris," at first, as I could feel, with a remnant of shyness, but gradually gaining confidence, so that in the end she rendered it with all the warmth and expression at her command. Perhaps it was owing to my extraordinarily complex mood that evening, this strange ending to a day of varied emotions, that I was held in such thrall. Jenny at my feet in the dimly-lit room before the flickering fire, Jenny in her blue overall, her fingers grimed and ink-stained, her face clear and childish once more turned towards me, wearing the expression of some primitive saint, and re-

flecting a deep unrestrained joy ! I had never imagined this plain, generally lifeless countenance to be capable of so much expression ; but what impressed me most was the vibrating depth of her warm, golden voice. At school Jenny usually spoke in an undertone and very quickly ; very occasionally I had heard her shouting angrily to one of her brothers, while, alone with Philip, she was in the habit of imitating his rough unmodulated tones, which she did to perfection. It came now as a pleasant surprise to hear how sensitive and pliant her voice really was, how wonderful her sense of varying colour, and I reflected sadly upon my own thin weak one, and the years of intense energy and unwearying struggle spent in trying to build up what Nature had grudged me. And at the same time I made up my mind that I would mould that birth-right of Jenny's. I would teach her to recite, this child in whom I had re-discovered my own love of rhythm and of sound. Through me and with me she should attain to those heights from which I had been debarred.

When she had finished, I neither praised nor censured. I knew she did not expect me to, so I only said : " Now do something else," and she went on and recited several extracts from our classical poets. It was a wonderful collection culled from the school-readings or her father's old library which contained the complete set of Ten Kate's works, but from which Multatuli had been banished as immoral ; and my amazement grew at her extraordinary memory and the energy with which, solely for her own diversion, she had made herself word-perfect in innumerable verses.

We had both forgotten the time. My lamp, as was its nightly custom towards the hour of ten, began to flicker, and I remembered remorsefully that Jenny could not possibly have had time to do her home-work. I certainly ought to send her away. I stood up to light the triple-branched candelabra upon my bureau, but yielded weakly to the impetuous force with which she dragged me back to my chair. She was in a state of exaltation at the sound of her own voice in the stillness, the rhythm of the melodious ringing words, the cadence of the gliding sentences. Her lips were scarlet and her eyes, in which the strange dilated pupils glowed brightly, were opened to their fullest extent.

“Only just one other moment,” she begged, “I’ve not done the most beautiful of all. You really must listen to this.”

I gave in and threw some more logs on the dying fire. A flame shot up and strange shadows fled through the silent room to the distant wall, illuminating in a ghostly manner the painted face and draperies of Amalia Heysten’s hooped satin skirt, which seemed suddenly to move.

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und wind ?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem kind. . . .

I smiled. Of course that was Jenny’s favourite poem ! She apparently had a strong predilection for the vividly-coloured, the secretly romantic, and she acted the wild drama of the episode while her pale face, lighted up by the fire and the flickering candle-light, reflected in turn the strong will of the father,

the demoniac seduction of the gnome and the deadly fear of the sick child.

It was exaggerated, far too fantastic and melodramatic, and I know that the lateness of the hour, the flickering shadows in the hollow, dimly-lighted room were responsible for the spell which the familiar hackneyed ballad cast over me.

How unearthly seemed Jenny's drawn face—her eyes apparently fixed in deadly fear. She had so thoroughly thrown herself into the part, that for a moment she actually suggested that it was she herself who saw the approach of the Erl-king, and against my will, I seemed to see her as the dying child when it feels the gnome's clutch.

Tonelessly, weakly, followed the last lines, the small white hands crossing themselves upon her breast as the heavy lids closed over the expressionless, apparently lifeless eyes. Annoyed with myself I shook off the spell.

"Well, Jen, that was a bit of Grand Guignol!" Then, uttering the thought, which suddenly occurred to me: "When you breathed like that just now, it was exactly like old Adrian."

She was leaning against me, tired and limp. For a moment she looked up absent-mindedly, as though it cost her an effort to take in my words, then she shook her head.

"No, I can't do it exactly like him—because you see—when Adrian pants, it's just as though he has to draw the little breath he has from the bottom of his lungs, as though he were pushing something heavy away each time, something sitting on his chest pressing his lungs together."

"So you really did try to imitate him?" I asked, astonished and annoyed.

"Well, doesn't Adrian make you think of the Erl-king, when he is standing behind you? The sick child pants just like that, the rhythm is the same. He feels the Erl-king near him—close to him—first hovering over his chest, and then pressing heavier and heavier, until he has squeezed out the last remnant of air from it. Adrian explained it to me when I was learning the Erl-king, and I asked him what asthma felt like. He said, 'It's like a devil sitting on your chest, Miss, a devil trying to press it flat with all his might.'"

During this last sentence, Jenny had reproduced the old man-servant to the life. She had mumbled the words hoarsely, interrupted and punctuated by wheezing gasps, so that the imitation which I had only just barely recognized in the Erl-king, now struck me as grimly accurate.

My feelings condemned her cold-blooded dissection of the disease which must be making a hell of the poor old man's life, but intense curiosity prompted me to ask: "And whom else can you imitate besides old Adrian and me?"

"O, whomever you like," said Jenny full of animation immediately. "Would you like the Head—Miss Petit at the little shop round the corner, or that Frisian boy in the sixth class?"

Laughing, I waved them all away. "No, thank you. It's high time for us to go to bed, Jenny."

But with a quick movement she had seized my glasses from the pile of uncorrected exercise-books at my side, and had put them on her nose, so that when

she turned towards me I recognized in her features, miraculously broadened in the blown-out puffed upper lip and narrow twinkling eyes, the pedantic, shrewd, yet good-natured countenance of the Rector. "It seems to me, Miss Schepp, that you attach an abnormal value to sleep as one of the functions of the human frame."

I burst out laughing. It was a perfect reproduction of the would-be edifying, self-satisfied voice of the "Head" and his manner of clothing a most ordinary observation in important and ceremonious language.

"Brava!" I exclaimed, forgetful of my dignity, while Jenny, once more the naughty child, laughed with me.

"Jen," I drew the child closer, stroking the short locks which waved about her forehead, "do you realize that yours is a great gift, an extraordinary one even?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "It is frightfully difficult," she remarked with naive conceit. "You thought just now that it came quite naturally, but it takes a lot of time and trouble to get it to perfection."

"At first," I said as though in fun, "I thought you could certainly be taught to recite quite well, but now I am convinced that you have the making of an actress in you."

The effect of my words startled me. Jenny sprang up in a state of nervous agitation.

"So you think so, too?" she asked breathlessly, gazing intently into my eyes. "You're not saying it for a joke—you really think so?"

"You would like to, then?"

Her hands fell limply against the dirty, blue overall,

her animated features relapsing into their usual lifeless expression as she said : " But, no—of course that could never be."

" Have you ever acted in anything ? "

" Only for myself." She made the remark hesitatingly as though ashamed of the admission, and her eyes seemed to question if after all I were not making fun of her. " I used to—and even now sometimes. Sometimes I am acting all day. I imagine myself to be a foundling, an exiled princess, or a captive in a harem. Then I invent the most thrilling adventures for myself, in which all those around me are also unconsciously playing a part."

" But don't you ever act in amateur performances ? When I was your age we used often to get up operettas, and sometimes even composed the things ourselves."

She again shook her head. " We never associated with other children, we Heystens. Sometimes I used to coax Philip to act with me. Then I was Mary Stuart, and he Elizabeth, or I was l'Aiglon, or Joan of Arc. But he thought it soppy when I entered into it so thoroughly and quite forgot that we were really only children and that the attic was not a battle-field, or the garden of a palace, or that I was not really talking to all sorts of imaginary personages."

" Wouldn't you love to act in a real play ? Why shouldn't you go on the stage if, as I firmly believe, you really have a gift for it."

She examined my face almost suspiciously, drawing her mouth into a hard line. " Because I'm a Heysten," she said as one who had endlessly repeated the words as a lesson—" and of course it would be quite impossible for a Heysten to go on the stage."

I laughed scornfully, feeling angry with the decayed grandeur downstairs. There was no money to give the girl a decent education, and in the end she must either become a household slave or a nursery governess, yet some foolish notion of caste would prevent her from choosing a calling for which, by nature and inclination, she had been predestined.

"Jenny," said I slowly and seriously, "do you really think that anyone, even a king or an emperor, could lose any of his greatness by being an artist?"

Her eyes lighted up as she listened in growing astonishment, then she protested hesitatingly: "But would you call an actress an artist?"

I drew her towards me, and put my hands upon her shoulders.

"Listen. When I was your age, it was my greatest ambition to become an actress. I too, had to fight against people who looked down upon the stage as something inferior, who did not consider an actor to be an artist, and when finally I won my cause and was free to go my own way, I discovered that I was wanting in two of the most important qualities necessary in the profession—a pliant melodious voice and an expressive countenance. What was denied to me has been vouchsafed to you. If you really desire it, if the stage is your true vocation, then I will help you to its fulfilment."

CHAPTER II

AT the girls' school where I started my career as a teacher, I had always held myself aloof from adoring and passionate friendships. I detected in the blind, uncritical worship of some of the girls for the teachers an unhealthy and dangerous element. I had severely condemned those of my colleagues who had encouraged this form of devotion and boasted of gifts of flowers or of the reception of exalted letters, but my scornful criticisms had usually been swept aside by the argument that in any case it was useless to try to prevent it, and after all, it kept the girls from a far greater danger—love-making with boys.

I was very good friends with some of my pupils, particularly the elder ones, knowing that when I took a class and allowed them to debate and recite, they thought it "topping," but I had never encouraged secret confidences or anything of that sort. However, after that first evening I often noticed Jenny's large grey eyes fixed upon me with a meek, happy and grateful gaze, and every now and then, found two roses upon my bureau, her humble homage on which, in this most expensive season for flowers, she must have exhausted all her pocket-money. I noticed daily that it was she who kept my room so neat, who put the hot-water bottle in my bed, pumped up the tyres

of my bicycle, and even brushed my clothes, so that it was impossible to relegate with a superior smile these perturbing tokens of affection to the sober regions of mere duty and submission. Whenever Jenny entered my room, her quiet face bent over the blue china cup, whose contents were always miraculously hot and fragrant, I could feel in her hesitating manner, in her lingering as she put it down at my elbow, her longing for the expected words: "Jenny, would you like to come in here for an hour, after you have finished your home-work?" And when I looked up I would see her lifeless expression change to one of childish joy, and notice her eyes fixed upon me with the silent gratitude which so warmed my lonely heart.

And then Jenny would come and sit upon the low stool at my feet, while the sounds in the big house gradually died away until at last the silence of the night solemnly enshrouded us, and we lived together through hours of great joy in which we read and acted scenes from "Hamlet," "Iphigénie" or "Tasso," and I told her of my own love, which I had sacrificed, and of the powerful acting which I had witnessed during my years of study in Berlin, when I had often gone without my lunch to pay for a seat in the gallery to see Basserman, Wegener, and Tilia Durieux. I also described to her the effect the acting of the Meinigers had upon me when I first saw them in Strindberg's or Ibsen's sombre and forcible dramas.

I fully recognize now that there was exaltation in my apostleship in those late secret hours, with Jenny, pale with excitement at my feet, listening to me with rapt attention while I recklessly worked upon her

imagination, feeling with rapture the force of the contact between us, knowing that I could use her as the instrument with which to call forth any melody I desired.

And if I sometimes stopped to consider the extent of my influence, to realize that I was not guiding her pliable personality, but merely stamping it with my own, I drove away all remorse with the knowledge that I was making the child happy as she had never been before in her sunless youth, that I was sowing the seed, preparing the path which she was predestined to tread—the path of the artist, the chosen among humanity.

Not only had Jenny an acute instinct for my moods and predilections, but very soon she adopted my mannerisms, and I only became aware of my own stereotyped expressions upon hearing her constantly making use of them.

With her shy self-consciousness she was as usual afraid of betraying to her companions her adoration for me, and always obstinately refused to accompany me home, but her absorbed attention as little escaped their notice as did her anger whenever anyone attempted a disparaging remark, or questioned my authority. "Jenny Heysten is in love with Miss Schepp," appeared one morning upon the wall of the college in black chalk, and when Jenny did not come in to lunch, having stayed behind to obliterate all traces of it, Philip with unrestrained glee, related the incident to his mother.

Even in those early days, Mrs. Heysten was already convinced of my pernicious "modern" ideas, and I

am certain that the lecture she gave her daughter in the faded drawing-room that afternoon was a severe one. It in no way however diminished that daughter's adoration; on the contrary, it but increased in it an element which had up till now only very vaguely disturbed me. Whereas formerly Jenny had only very rarely stroked my hand or arm, she now displayed in the joyful excited moods she brought to our readings, a brusque and sensual tenderness, when she would almost roughly seize my knees and rub her cheek against them, and more than once I had had to reprimand her severely for kissing me upon my neck when she stood behind me. Then she would appear timid and cringing like a beaten hound, yet upon another occasion after reading the "Witches' Ballad" she kissed my hands with so much fervour that I angrily forbade her ever to do such a thing again. She cried then, her untidy bobbed head buried in my lap.

"Why not? Why mayn't I? There's never anyone else here to kiss. Mother thinks it silly—makes fun of me—and I do love you so Miss Margaret. Why mayn't I kiss you when I am so frightfully fond of you?"

"Because I won't have it," I replied shortly. "Because it's silly, painful, unwholesome."

She tightened her sensitive mouth. "And suppose I were a man," she said at last after some reflection, "and loved you as much as I do now I could kiss you as much as I liked. And I know I shall never care so much for a man as I do for you—never—I'm quite sure of that."

Our modern literature has endeavoured to probe to its utmost the problem of relationship between man and woman ; why does it give so little attention to the far more intricate one between two women ?

In Jenny, as a reverse to her touching devotion, I detected a fierce jealousy. And whereas she displayed her affection with childish frankness, she disguised the other with all the wiles of an accomplished woman of the world. Months elapsed before I found out why Bertie Helmers, a clever boy in her class, who used to come sometimes in the evening to borrow books, never crossed my threshold any more. Jenny had persuaded him by some tale or the other that it was no longer convenient for me to receive him. She was also the cause of Timon, who liked holding forth about Buddhism or Theosophy, suddenly becoming disagreeable, answering me curtly, and then avoiding me altogether. Jenny had told him I mocked at Theosophy as at all faiths, indeed that I was writing a satirical novel in which I intended impersonating him. When I found this out, I questioned her, and she immediately acknowledged her interference. I can still see her standing before me like a naughty child, yet with an obstinacy in her eyes, quite unsubdued by my indignation.

" I may as well tell you," she said at last somewhat contemptuously, " I can see now for myself that it was rather a mean thing to do, but I know I should do the same thing again if I thought you cared more for anyone else than for me."

" And if I tell you that I despise you, love you less on account of such jealousy, won't you try to fight against it ? "

She did fight at that moment, clenching her small fists, her eyes full of tears. "You've never really understood Othello," she burst forth at last, "or you would know it's not anything one can fight against, any more than you can conquer some insidious disease coming on you."

Then with the strange pleasure she always seemed to feel in making comparisons between mental sensations and those purely physical, she tried to explain: "Feeling jealous is like a wound which is awfully painful to touch, yet which you keep on touching to find out how much it does hurt."

The summer holidays brought to Jenny two re-examinations and to me her passionate leave-taking of sobs and tears when she came to my room that last night to help me pack the books I expected to read during my weeks of peace and freedom.

Notwithstanding the many discomforts of the Heysten ménage, merely to please her I had agreed to take on my room for another six months, meanwhile entrusting to her the key of my book-case and begging her to look after my sanctuary, to water the precious cacti in the window, and to see that the many books and manuscripts left upon my table were not touched during my absence. As my train steamed out of the station the following morning and I gazed from the window of the railway carriage for a last look at the empty platform where a forlorn little grey figure stood waving a large handkerchief, I felt sorry that I had not, as I had first thought of doing, asked Jenny to stay with me at my own home. What sort of holiday would the poor child have? A series of dreary

monotonous days, a mountain of algebra and history to study without a single amusement in prospect. At my side the jasmine, gathered for me that morning in the neglected garden, exhaled its scented breath. On my lap lay a packet of my favourite sweets and I reflected sadly how much I should miss these little attentions, the many tokens of affection which, like a spoilt child, I had come to consider as my due.

But once more in my own home, in the midst of its calm uncomplicated surroundings, among these sober single-minded members of my own family, the memory of Jenny and indeed of all the Heystens faded and finally disappeared into the dim background. I had anticipated an interested audience for my reminiscences about the wonderful house and its still more wonderful inmates. I had intended boasting a bit about my discovery of Jenny's genius, but once at home, I soon felt that these anecdotes would not produce the desired effect.

Amid these calm surroundings, my experience with Jenny seemed suddenly to have become complex, and in retrospect, I felt dissatisfied with myself. Perhaps that is why I only answered her long, untidy, yet touching screeds with an occasional picture-card, and when, at the beginning of August, I started off with one of my sisters to Switzerland I advised her to stop writing for the present as we were uncertain of our address.

And I must admit that I gave but little thought to Jenny Heysten during the weeks which, for the first time in my life, I spent in a Swiss mountain village, my literary interest concentrated upon Baedeker, as

with nailed shoes and the courage of inexperience, I ventured forth upon "Hochturen" and glacier expeditions.

However, towards the end of my stay, a letter was forwarded to me from a Students' Dramatic Society. Having some celebration in view, they wanted my advice in the selection of some original work, ancient or modern, worthy of performance for the occasion.

As are most scientific persons, I was desirous of full recognition for my knowledge of art-culture, so I discarded mountain-tops, and Alpine-flora at the bidding of the sons of Alma Mater, to once more mount my hobby-horse of mediæval drama with enthusiasm and fire. I wired to Holland for the necessary books, and while Leila, grumbling, continued her walks unaccompanied, I perused with careful industry extracts from a number of mediæval works which, if properly performed should, in my opinion, gloriously demonstrate to the adherents of the modern stage their acting possibilities and dramatic value.

I hereby acknowledge that I estimated far too highly the capabilities of this, to me utterly unknown, amateur society. I felt convinced that an ordinary theatrical company would not make anything of the naïve simplicity of a mediæval play, and thought that because of their studies in mediæval literature it might safely be entrusted to these cultured students. Besides, I at once made up my mind (how it was to be done I didn't know) that Jenny should take part in that performance. She in no wise belonged to the "smart set" of her town, and she was just as little likely to have connections among the theatrical one,

but my recommendation would open a way for her. Would not the young people to whom I was rendering such disinterested service, be glad in their turn, to do something to please me ?

As usual in such cases, the stage management of the play was to be entrusted to Dirk Manders, and although when it came to mediævalism I had but little confidence in this clever actor-manager who achieved most of his triumphs with a daring kind of French farce, yet, as a prominent member of the profession, he at all events would be able to develop Jenny's gifts. After the interchange of some courteous correspondence, in which the committee, assured of my knowledge and discretion, decided to leave the selection of the play to me, I chose " Marieke van Nimweghe," and suggested Jenny Heysten, in whose talent I had great faith, as the impersonator of the title-rôle.

I had not reckoned with the fact that the adjudication of the parts at a students' performance is in no way decided from an artistic stand-point, and Jonkheer Hoofft, the charming secretary to whom I had confided my wish, afterwards told me of the indignant surprise with which his co-members had received his nomination of Jenny Heysten who was not of their set, who was not even the daughter of a professor, as the ideal exponent for the part of Marieke. When towards the end of August, I received the provisional sanction (the final decision was to be left to Dirk Manders), I felt convinced that the delight I had in store for her would thoroughly compensate Jenny for the dreariness of her holidays spoilt by figures and dates. She certainly could never have imagined that

her greatest wish, to act in a real play, was about to be fulfilled.

I returned a week before school began, and it was only when I saw the last porter pass me with his load of luggage, while I stood with my heavy suit-case and a rolled-up umbrella in the midst of a hurrying throng of travellers, that I realized how surely I had reckoned upon Jenny's presence and help. I asked myself nervously whether the telegram to Mrs. Heysten announcing my arrival had somehow miscarried. I believe Leila is right in maintaining that I am possessed of an extra sense in feeling the atmosphere of a house, for that afternoon as I stood before the Heystens' paintless door and gazed up at the row of windows with their neglected blinds and dirty curtains, which after one month spent in the immaculate home of my parents and another in an equally immaculate Swiss hotel I yet again recognized with an incomprehensible feeling of joy, I knew that in this dwelling something was different. I noticed that the torn, worn-out door-mat over which every member of the family used to step carefully, and over which every stranger used to stumble, had been replaced by a brand-new one, that the propped-up hat-stand, formerly laden with old coats and discarded hats which no one had ever dreamt of disturbing, had been cleared by some energetic hand. In a mood of inexplicable dissatisfaction, I walked past the new peasant servant who, with a good-natured grin, was about to show me into the drawing-room, and was beginning to mount the stairs, burdened with my suit-case and other parcels, when a door slammed somewhere in the hall; there

was a rustling of skirts behind me and a hand grasped my bag. I turned round, and my unbounded amazement must have been depicted upon my face because Jenny burst out laughing. She was all in pink, "a sale bargain" was my immediate classification of the limp, floppy voile which hung about her slight figure in a superfluity of pleats and flounces, in my opinion a thoroughly unsuccessful attempt at fashion and smartness which made me regret the old grey sack, in which at least there had been some individuality.

Jenny was changed, so completely changed in every way, that at first my mind refused to take it all in. She had acquired a slow, extremely correct "Hague" accent, languid and would-be indifferent; her hands, which I had never previously seen otherwise than dirty and ink-stained, were immaculate with highly-polished nails. The short untidy locks I used to be so fond of stroking, waved smoothly round forehead and ears, while a velvet band completed a showy, yet becoming coiffure. I had expected unbounded joy. I had pictured to myself how, sobbing with delight, she would fling her arms around my neck and almost smother me in her embrace. Instead of which she shook hands, dropped a somewhat clumsy kiss upon my cheek, and piloted me up the stairs, supporting me with her arm thrust through one of mine, like a sweet young girl trying to help some elderly dame. I remember her saying something incoherent about "a pleasant surprise," and "we are all so glad to have you back again."

But when I opened the door of my room, a flush of

anger and disappointment flooded my face. One glance was sufficient to show me that during my absence someone else had taken possession of it. My bureau had been pushed back against the wall, and upon it stood an apparatus which I at once recognized as a microscope. Piles of clothing, newspapers and torn magazines were strewn over my arm-chairs; and in the middle of the floor was a gaping portmanteau with an untidy heap of clothes—men's clothes, thrown down on a chair next to it. I crossed over to the window where my cacti, particularly entrusted to Jenny's care, stood like a row of withered old men, and a hasty glance was sufficient to observe on the untidy bureau unmistakable signs of cigar ash and a big ink stain upon my Russian leather blotter.

Trembling with anger, I turned towards Jenny. She took no notice, was standing looking away from me to the chair with the heap of clothes, holding an old, soft grey hat, a shapeless thing, stroking it with her delicate fingers, an expression of exquisite tenderness and affection upon her small, thin face which, as she stood thus with bent head, seemed to have assumed the calm mysterious rapture of some primitive Madonna. All at once, as dissatisfaction, disappointment and annoyance chased one another through my brain with a further sensation of feeling hopelessly ridiculous, I understood with sharp distinctness that with all my knowledge of life, of art, I was jealous, jealous of Jenny, as though I were her rejected lover.

"Well, Jenny?" I asked with cool contempt.

She looked up at me and laughed shyly. For one moment the large grey childlike eyes, as though in

guilt, tried to read my face. Then she threw the hat back on to the untidy heap, and with all her former brusque tenderness, clasped her arms round my neck.

"Miss Schepp—please don't be angry," she begged in the old schoolgirl voice, "it's because—you gave us so frightfully little time. If we had only known sooner that you intended returning this afternoon, I can assure you Nick's things would all have been cleared out of the room."

"Who is Nick?" I inquired disagreeably.

"Nico Maes—*Jonkheer* Nico Maes," improving upon the name with a simple, childish pride that annoyed me. "He has been staying here all through August, because he is working in Professor Berend's laboratory and could not find a suitable room anywhere. Afterwards he—afterwards we—we are engaged and we are so frightfully fond of one another."

I sank into the chair by the bureau struggling with the empty feeling of disappointment creeping over me, vainly seeking a sentence with which to greet Jenny's information.

"Then he is a student?" I asked at last, in order to show some interest in the intruder.

She nodded affirmatively. "Almost qualified—a friend of Timon's when they were at boarding-school together. But he's not a bit like Timon, ethical, spiritual and all that. He is topping at tennis. One of the best at 'doubles' in Holland. If he hadn't had to go in for his final, he would have gone over to England to take part in the tournament."

Jenny uttered the word "doubles" in a prim little voice, and her enthusiastic reverence for games, in

which formerly she had never evinced the slightest interest, seemed to me just as unnatural and as equally prepared for the occasion as the hideous pink frock, the velvet hair-band and everything else so changed in her. I realized with sudden severity why I found it so impossible to utter a commonplace sentence of good wishes. As a matter of fact, it was nothing but wounded self-love, the knowledge of finding myself mistaken in thinking I had discovered something extraordinary in Jenny Heysten and having flattered myself as being the means of raising her undeniable gifts and possibilities to their achievement.

Jenny's love for art, which I had fancied to be so strong, had imagined to be her vocation, had easily been overcome by the first boastful young sportsman, who would naturally consider poetry "sentimental rot," and would estimate a revue far more highly than the legitimate drama. Tactfully I inquired: "And is he just as proud of your talent as you are of his? I suppose he loves to hear you recite?"

"Of course he does," she agreed whole-heartedly with a joyful little laugh, her fingers playing with my hand which lay upon the arm of the chair. "But he only cares for funny things. The others make him feel sad—too sad you understand—because in the life of a doctor there's so much sadness anyhow."

I observed the rapt, trustful gaze of her large grey eyes, and my heart softened. I drew her towards me with a strange mingling of sorrow and bitterness as I felt how alarmingly fragile her childish figure seemed in my grasp.

"So you know for certain, Jenny," said I with a

smile I did my best to make ingratiating, "that he is the one and only—the only true one."

It was long before she answered. "I did not think it could be possible," she said with a mysterious little smile, "to love anyone so much, and I never thought it would be so lovely——" and suddenly, with her old exuberance, she seized my head with her two hands, "Oh, Miss Margaret, do you know what I am always hoping—thinking of all the time? That you, too, will still be married, that some man will be frightfully fond of you, as he will be if he gets to know you thoroughly."

I laughed as, with a joke, I dismissed Jenny; then in the fading sunlight of the late afternoon, in the unaccustomed, untidy room, I shed the last tears for my lost youth and unfulfilled dreams. When, later, I went downstairs, dressed in my best, in honour of this important occasion and the presence of the aristocratic fiancé, all rebellious thoughts and extravagant longings had been subdued and obliterated, so that when I entered the drawing-room where Mrs. Heysten in blue velvet was sitting in front of her embroidery frame, her new son-in-law at her side in token of the approval which she bestowed upon this betrothal, I had regained all my customary calm, and was able to find the exact words appropriate to the occasion, expected from "our guest of whom Jenny is so fond."

Jonkeer Nicolaas Maes had apologized with equal fluency and politeness for the muddle he had left in my room, and directly afterwards had disappeared with Jenny to pack up the remainder of his things before taking his departure that evening, and during

the half-hour before dinner I had the supreme pleasure of listening to Mrs. Heysten's tender description of the idyll which, in true magazine-story fashion, had been played out with her benevolent maternal sanction during the last few weeks.

But I am afraid that on that first evening, I, like a real old maid, sat stiff and surly at the family board which, in honour of the son-in-law, was supplemented by a watery soup, while old Adrian carefully refilled the wine-glasses instead of only going round once as usual.

Even I must admit that Nicolaas Maes was a particularly fine specimen of the masculine sex, and that very first evening I gathered the impression that during a successful career as handsome male, he must have become pretty well immune from flattery and admiration, so excellently did he play his part as the fêted central point of the Heysten family, which laughed at his silliest jokes, and listened seriously to his most obvious platitudes. He had a pleasant, open, sun-burnt face, and was endowed with two rows of white, perfect teeth, a strong supple frame, the easy good manners of a rich, well-bred youth, and a whole arsenal of agreeable conventional student-like convictions.

Was it to be wondered at if Jenny appeared to be head over heels in love? But why, in the name of Heaven, had this man, whose easy conquests could be read upon his self-satisfied face, who had undoubtedly "gone the pace," singled out Jenny as his future wife? To a woman like me, a woman—well, yes—without any superficial attractions, the ease with

which some women, not at all pretty, neither young nor interesting, manage to enthrall and capture the affections of men, remains ever an unsolved mystery. To me it seems as though the world of women were divided into two halves, one of which talks and understands the secret language, composed of women after whom the passing stranger turns round in the street, before whom men bow down to the glance and smile which resemble the redemption of some promise. And the other half, to whom men give respect, friendship, often their confidence, the half to which I belong, but who do not talk or will ever understand.

I had never suspected Jenny, as yet an undeveloped child, timid, reserved, untidy and hopelessly ill-dressed, of being "the young man's flapper." That she should so easily have known how to bring this woman-petted youth to her feet was a source of amazement and irritation to me. From the very first day I summed up my judgment with pitiless insight. With Nico, Jenny had become another being, quite different in every way from the devoted, beauty-loving child who had sat upon the little stool at my feet, and with sick aversion I asked myself the question I so often asked myself afterwards: "How much in her is genuine, how much affection, camouflage?"

Close to Nico, Jenny was a child, woman and sphinx in one, sometimes wholly trustful and confiding, at another time uncertain, coquettish, with a thousand promises in her eyes; and although she now and then adopted a mocking expression in listening to his most self-sufficient anecdotes, she nevertheless was just what a man likes the woman he loves to be. It was

only much later that I understood that it must be this instinct of Jenny's which gave her so great a power over those who loved her. She was not acting a part as she was often so bitterly accused of doing, but her strong intuition and gift of assimilation enabled her to adapt herself instinctively, unconsciously to the character in which he who was in love with her liked best to see her.

As Nico's fiancée, I for the first time saw her as it were "in another skin." She never spoke without a "Hague" accent or otherwise than in the careless, inarticulate manner considered "good form" among the smart modern set. She evinced an unwearying interest in the sports column of the newspapers, and talked about "top-spin drives" and "back-volleys" as though tennis had been a life-long absorption with her; and I often saw her, she who had never formerly possessed gloves, patiently holding out a grey glacé-clad hand until her fiancé, fumbling with the finicking buttons, had at last succeeded in mastering them. Nico was himself too much in love to suspect that there was another side to Jenny, a side which he neither understood nor would ever understand. He knew too little about humanity to be able to see through the camouflage, to discover how Jenny had arrayed herself in qualities to please him, as she had arrayed herself in the pink frock and velvet hair-ribbon which were fashionable and becoming, but which were utterly at variance with her personality. The day after my return I started my school work. I worked at my renewed task with more than necessary fervour, and at the same time applied for a post in

Amsterdam at a private college about to be opened there. In the evenings I sought material for and completed a study upon Luyken, begun the previous winter, but discarded on account of the readings with Jenny.

I saw very little of the lovers. Nico as house surgeon at the "Academy Hospital" was kept busy, and, during his few days of freedom, dragged his fiancée with him to hockey and football matches, or took her to dinner at some smart restaurant in Amsterdam or the Hague. But one day in January while dining with us, he surprised me with the half-incredulous question :

"By the way, Miss Schepp, is it a fact that you told those people of the 'Students' Dramatic Society' that Jenny was to act the principal part in that play of theirs?" I saw Jenny's astonished, almost frightened, face turned towards me, and with the same glance intercepted the frown upon that of Mrs. Heysten, as though something indecent had been mentioned, and I was at once conscious of the irritable atmosphere into which the colourless table conversation had landed me that afternoon.

"When I asked the committee whether Jenny might be allowed to take part in the performance, I was still ignorant of her engagement. I did not go further into the matter because I quite understood that nothing would come of it now."

Nico stared at me in astonishment. "But Miss Schepp, why on earth not? Hoofft, too, seemed to take it for granted that Jenny would refuse to act with them now——"

"That you would certainly refuse to let her," I amended more sharply than I intended, for in the depth of my heart I hid a weakness for this boy with his open face and, even towards me, an old maid, unvarying courtesy and consideration.

He put down his fork, and with raised eyebrows smiled first into Jenny's eyes and then turned towards his future mother-in-law.

"What kind of antediluvian tyrant do you take me for? Now, Miss Schepp, do you really think I'm so pre-historic as to grudge my little girl a pleasure because I cannot take part in it myself?"

"It's not usual for an engaged couple——" began Mrs. Heysten with the air of an oracle.

But Nico was getting excited. "What nonsense, Mrs. Heysten! Whoever heard of such stuff in these enlightened times? Lucy Lehmann always plays in tennis tournaments, while Boers, her fiancé, cannot even hit a ball—there's an example for you! Now-a-days engaged couples leave one another free to decide such matters for her or himself. It seems this is to be quite a big affair. They've got a chap from a real theatre to study and rehearse with them, and as it's a lustrum, there are sure to be heaps of bigwigs from the other universities present, so I think it'd be topping for my little girl to be the most important character on the stage at an affair like that!"

"You big child," thought I, while Jenny leant across the table to ask me in nervous suspense, "Do you know what they are going to act, Miss Schepp?"

"Of course. They asked my advice about it last summer, and I selected 'Marieke van Nimweghe' for them."

“And did you tell them that I”—Jenny’s eyes lighted up—“that I could play the principal part?”

Nico winked at me at sight of her incredulous joy, then seizing her hand with both of his: “What do you think about it? Shall we accept?” he asked in the voice with which a grown-up person talks to a child. Didn’t that “we,” accepted by Jenny with meek gratitude, speak volumes?

“Then I shall go round to the inn this evening and tell Hoofft. Is it a good play, Miss Schepp? Won’t all the flappers here be jealous to think that my little Jenny has snatched such a dainty morsel from under their very noses?”

Mrs. Heysten, haughtily erect, had listened in silence to this arrangement, which I knew in no way coincided with her ideas. However, to please her rich and patrician son-in-law, she restrained herself sufficiently to make no opposition when Nico took it for granted that the plan met with her approval.

Returning after dinner a moment to fetch my bag which I had left hanging from the knob of my chair, I found Jenny and Nico alone. He had flung his arms around her, and she stood within them, her head thrown back, gazing up at him.

“It’s so sweet of you not to mind,” she said, the deep thrilling sound in her voice which had been entirely absent from it during the last few months. “I love you so—Oh, if only you knew—if only you knew half how much——”

“Silly little thing,” said the young man, kissing her with his smiling lips, “silly, excited little girl——”

Forgetting my bag, I turned hastily and fled,

fighting once more against that old involved feeling of jealousy. What did it matter if her talent was wasted now that she possessed that other? Wasn't it the most normal way? And in the light of this bitter mood, I suddenly looked back upon the joy with which, because of her talent, she had lived with and through me, as nothing more than the hysteria of a couple of unbalanced women.

On the 17th of March of that same year, Jenny, for the first and, as she firmly believed, the last time in her life, acted in a play. Since her engagement, I had petulantly banished from my mind "Marieke van Nimweghe," and everything appertaining to it, and was not best pleased when the committee reminded me of my erstwhile promise. They wanted me to attend the first meeting of the performers with the "great" Manders, who was to initiate them into the difficulties of the old Dutch, and at the same time to give them the necessary explanations as to the origin and significance of the play. I had never suffered a greater rebuff. It had seemed to me that I was decidedly the one indicated to be asked to read the play with its correct accent and delivery. But Dirk Manders, broad and imposing with his great Roman Emperor's head, his rolling stage voice and grand gestures, without consulting me in any way took the task upon himself, or rather acted for us the naïve mediæval play as though it were a kind of romantic melodrama. He contrived to avoid the pitfalls of the difficult dialogue with all the ease of arrogance and presumption; each obsolete word he did not quite

understand or which may have sounded obscene in his ears he calmly replaced by another which in his opinion was of the same or of better significance, and in spite of the notes and sketches I had plentifully supplied, he juggled with the text in a way which I, with my B.A. degree, considered as no less than a shameless sacrilege. When he had finished and in a princely manner condescended to bestow a word upon me, I was foolish enough to insist in a sharp and impetuous little speech, on the necessity of keeping to the original accent, of trying to explain that an old work such as this could only be interpreted correctly if it received the exact rendering, with all its characteristic simplicity, in which it had been written.

I was not then aware of the unwritten law which decreed that one must never draw direct attention to any fault in this "King of the Boards," but should always prepare the way with: "Not that I wish to make any suggestion depreciative of your rendering—of course you are sure to know best, etc." Sitting opposite me, Dirk Manders listened to my protest with a bored superior smile, glancing twice at his watch while I was speaking, and I had barely finished when I heard him ask his neighbour, the chairman, in an audible whisper: "What on earth has that old maid to do with it at all?"

A moment later, he held out a condescending hand to me in leave-taking. "You seem to feel a deep affection for this play," he remarked with the smile of a good-natured god. "So I've no doubt you quite understand it could not possibly be in better hands."

"I'm not merely relying upon my own opinion," I

replied. "I am only an amateur as far as the stage is concerned, but that is how Lucas Veraart taught me to judge, Lucas Veraart who has reverence for language, who does not consider art as subservient to the actor, and who would never change or omit a word in a masterpiece to obtain a personal effect."

I heard a nervous little laugh from the chairman. I glanced round the table and suddenly noticed Jenny gazing in rapt admiration at the actor, and I felt thoroughly ashamed of my ludicrous argument with the conceited man who in this circle was looked upon as unassailable as the Pope himself. But Dirk Manders' face had already resumed its customary smile; he came and clapped me on the back, grimacing and closing his eyes like a cat as he said with honeyed sweetness:

"I thought as much. I suppose you have had lessons from him. You could not have cited a better example with which to illustrate my theory, my dear lady. Because Lucas Veraart is not an actor—he only thinks he is."

Never before had Nico Maes and I had so much in common as during the weeks preceding the performance of "Marieke." We had a mutual aversion to Manders, I because of his self-conceit in mutilating the old play, and Nico because of the uncritical admiration which his fiancé evinced for the actor from the time of the first rehearsal.

But Jenny also felt an intense interest in the play itself. From the day of the first rehearsal she quite discarded her rôle of devoted bride. She was no

longer the enthusiastic sports-maiden, and in the place of the so carefully cultivated "Hague" accent, her voice adopted an unmistakable likeness to that of Manders. She had ceased to be correct and subservient, but relapsed once more into the dreamy fantastic child I had known, with bright teasing moods alternating with others of a surly reserve. She appeared to be utterly oblivious of the hurt feelings of the "most precious one," who long ago had regretted his modern ideas and never lost an opportunity of making some disparaging remark about the stage and the inferior people whose profession it was.

I had expected to be the one to study the part of Marieke with Jenny or at least thought she would have sought my help with the pronunciation and the sometimes obscure significance of the words, but I noticed at once how she submitted herself uncritically and entirely to Manders, in whose judgment she had far greater faith than in mine.

Dirk Manders was in my opinion, and also that of Veraart's, far more of the business man than the artist, and the inner delicacy of a play like "Marieke," which as Hoofft informed me afterwards, he had characterized as "awful drivel," was quite beyond his comprehension. All the same, he was the right man to drill an amateur company and give them some insight as to diction and form, to exact by means of his thundering voice and inexhaustible stock of jokes their respect and good-humour. Above all, he was the first real actor with whom Jenny had come into contact. What she learned about the "profession," and he certainly was proficient in his know-

ledge of that, was precisely what, owing to her shyness and gaucherie, she most needed. He taught her the value of the gesture which should accompany the spoken word, and, as time went on, and his influence increased, greatly to the annoyance of her betrothed and that of her own family, Jenny's shortest sentence was accompanied by some gesture or other.

During the last week before the performance, the atmosphere in the Heysten family became somewhat unpleasant. A big coloured poster decorated all the hoardings of the town, thus attracting universal attention to the forthcoming event, a fact nowise in accordance with the Heysten tradition. Jenny's parents up to the present had looked upon the whole thing as a private affair, a modern sort of party, and their incalculable conventionality was particularly wounded by the appearance of notices in the papers announcing the play, with the name of the stage manager in juxtaposition with Tom Bergman's and Jenny's as principal performers. But the storm burst when Philip a few days later casually mentioned that the price of the seats was to be five gulden. As neither Nico nor Jenny were present, the whole of Mrs. Heysten's wrath was vented upon me, who had induced her daughter to take part in such a degrading performance.

"Why, Jenny might just as well be a professional actress! The students ought to be ashamed of themselves to give a paid performance, and moreover to dare to ask a Heysten to take part in it."

It was the only time I ever witnessed a scene at the Heysten dinner-table when I sat listening to Mrs.

Heysten reproaching her timid husband for having passed the theatre every day and never having noticed upon the hoardings the printed notices of this crying scandal. She made the shy self-conscious man promise to go to the chairman at once and insist that all sums gained at the performance should be given to some charity, or otherwise Jenny should not be allowed to take part in it.

Of course the business was arranged with a promise that the profits, after the deduction of expenses, should be given to some needy philanthropic institution, and thus the Heysten honour was preserved; but on the day of the dress rehearsal and the day following, I once more heartily repented of the impulse which had induced me to introduce Jenny and the Student Dramatic Society to one another.

After the dress rehearsal, Jenny came home shedding tears of disappointment and temper. She had had a quarrel with Tom Bergman about the conception of a scene, and Manders had agreed with Tom. "They don't understand it a little bit," she said stammering with rage. "They don't understand Marieke in the least, and that's why they think my rendering wrong." Whereupon Timon, with an edge to his voice which I had not expected from his weak mouth, observed that Jenny was apparently not lacking in self-confidence, and asked me why I had ever imagined her to be capable of acting the chief part in a difficult, mediæval play, and what sort of figure I should cut if she, my choice of a play, or both, should turn out to be a failure. . . .

Upon the great night it was with a nervous head-

ache and a sensation of unholy menace that I entered the box in the centre of the first tier which had been reserved for the Heysten family and myself. At the last moment there had been some friction with Timon, who did not want to go because he considered acting to be degrading to all that is exalted in the human soul, and with Philip, who did want to go but did not possess a decent suit. Nico, too, tired and overworked, had arrived just five minutes after Jenny had driven away in the hired brougham. As we entered the already crowded theatre, Mrs. Heysten leading the way in black satin and sequins, an indescribable coiffure and the bearing of an offended empress, with behind her as retinue her nervous husband and her youngest son in an ill-fitting suit of his elder brother's, I could feel at once the hostile attention of the whole of the smart society present. I felt ashamed of my own shame. In their home, in the midst of their neglected but characteristic surroundings, I had thought the Heystens interesting, had even admired them in a way, while here they seemed merely objects of ridicule. Restlessly I left the stuffy box, hurried through the crowded corridors and down the stairs. I scented danger to Jenny, who, discussed by and mocked at by many disappointed mothers, certainly belonged to the fallen greatness above. In the vague hope of seeing her for a moment and of saying some word of encouragement, I hurried towards the little door, with "No exit" upon it, which led to the stage. I received a shock when I found Nico with a pale face leaning against the wall.

"How's Jen—very nervous?" I asked hastily.

"How should I know," he answered shortly. "She wouldn't even let me in. I was sent away by that dresser of hers with a 'Miss Heysten has no time. Mr. Manders himself is making her up.'"

"I suppose he did not consider the hairdresser sufficiently——" I began uncertainly, because he seemed so cross. The youth's handsome face was disfigured by the angry pout of his lower lip.

"Oh, are you taken in by that?" he asked roughly. "Well, then, I'm not—I know that gentleman. If Jen's really had a row with him, I expect he took liberties which annoyed her."

"Nonsense," I contradicted irritably. "Nothing has happened to give you the right to imagine anything of the sort. There you are again with that absurd idea of every actor being a seducer by profession."

He angrily shrugged his shoulders, and it was easy to translate his contemptuous gaze into: "What do you know about it, an old maid like you?"

"I am very glad you were not able to talk to Jenny. I am sure you would have made her nervous and upset her acting."

His scornful laugh resounded in my ears as I ran back through the empty corridors past the unemployed attendants. A fierce hush greeted my entrance into the box. The play was just beginning.

There is no more difficult class of playgoer—I discovered this on the night of Jenny's debut—than the devoted parents, aunts, cousins and acquaintances at an amateur performance, who, encumbered with family pride and convinced of their right to an evening's

amusement, whisper to one another their uncritical admiration, and even laugh good-humouredly if the heroine forgets her lines.

Dirk Manders knew his audience better than I, who had thought it was precisely the unschooled and therefore natural rendering of these well-disposed amateurs that would do so much to bring this simple naïve play into the prominence which its qualities undoubtedly deserved. With his flair for farce, Manders had sought wherever he could for comic effects. Heer Gysbrecht, the uncle with his red wig and protruding paunch, bore a far greater resemblance to one of Jan Steen's drinking peasants than to an ascetic priest, and the old Moci, impersonated by a good-looking young girl who had donned a cap and grey wig for the occasion, uttered her first lines with a Marie Lloyd-like impudence which evoked enthusiastic applause from the students occupying the first row of the stalls.

The audience laughed at everything that night. They laughed when Jenny made her appearance in a white-winged cap carrying a big basket on her arm, and nearly all her lines were lost amid the whispering and buzzing giggles. Dirk Manders received the praise which was his due for the sober setting which, with its quick changes in every detail, could be adapted to every scene. And yet during each of the short intervals, when all glamour seemed absent, while chocolate cartons rattled and the accumulated voices swelled into a humming choir, I again regretted my choice of a play. Only when Marieke makes her entrance alone, chased from her aunt's door, driven out into the darkness of the night, an inexperienced village maid in the

grip of evil and temptation, did Jenny get a chance. Suddenly there was silence, attention resembling amazement at the sorrowful complaint of the clear melodious voice, at the despairing attitude, the nervous glance around as she listened affrighted to the sounds in the darkness at the crystalline clarity of the unaccustomed dialect flowing over the footlights. But directly afterwards the Devil made his entrée and was greeted by the audience with the whispering idolatry with which it acknowledges its star. For Tom Bergman was Manders' pupil and the chief pillar of the dramatic society. The part of the Devil was a showy one, and this long thin "Moenen" sprang, glided, and strode about the stage with wonderful suppleness and thrilling acrobatic movements. The young man resembled a bat in the black spreading wings of his cloak, with his slender and supple frame and his frequently quite fine gestures and postures, but his acting, although no doubt excellent for an amateur, was loaded with exaggeration. The whole attention of the audience was immediately concentrated upon him and his comical clownish movements, while the schooled range of his voice from a clear whisper to a deep gruffness evoked surprised appreciation. And who was there now to notice Jenny who, small and slight, was overshadowed by the waving of the black wings? And yet how wonderfully realistic had been her alarm at his appearance, and the enthralled fear in her voice at his first words; and afterwards, when Marieke realizes that it is the "enemy of mankind" standing before her, how telling her timid curiosity as she glided closer to him as though under

some spell, the charm of which attracts the frightened child all unwillingly towards that of which it is nevertheless terrified.

Was I the only one to be impressed by her? Or were there one or two others among the now silent and attentive spectators to whom the slight childish figure of Marieke in the scarlet coat, violet skirt, and prim starched cap, was the only "living" character upon that movement-filled stage, the only one to create an atmosphere around her?

And did not her transformation into Moenen's light o' love come as a delightful revelation even to that luke warm, self-important audience? In an ample trailing gown of wine-coloured velvet with a golden fillet in her hair, a rustling string of pearls between her porcelain-like fingers, Jenny possessed the charm of some exotic princess as in front of the inn she trod among the roysterers with the glance from her half-closed eyes both alluring and despising them. But Manders had introduced much "business" into this scene, and had patched it with minstrels and dancing peasants, which spoilt the effect of Marieke's fine soliloquy, her self-examination, her dejected uncertainty—

I've come too far, e'en should I try to turn——

Her voice had become deep and thrilling, and each wavering thought was mirrored upon her inspired face with its dilated ecstatic eyes. She had evidently entirely forgotten that she was acting, was as lost in her part as on that evening in my room when she recited the "Erl-king." And then—the wild shriek of

mingled grief and joy with which Marieke shakes off her remorse, the exuberant bacchanal gesture with which she seizes a goblet of wine as wheeling round towards the greedily leering roysterers, she almost hurls herself into their midst——

My emotion is choking me as I again feel the old wonderful sensation of being uplifted, transported into another world, while the applause bursts forth. The curtain is rung up and down like some strange waving thing, and with a sudden shock I realize that for moments together I had quite forgotten that I was sitting in a theatre, but had been living in Jenny's representation. Then I hear someone remark : " That little peasant-girl in the green hat is a jolly good dancer," and I still seem to hear Mrs. Heysten's whisper to her husband : " I think it is a most peculiar play," and with a feeling of suffocation at the heat, movement and buzz of conversation in the theatre, I spring from my seat, and, stumbling in the dark, try to grope my way outside.

I remained standing for a moment at the open door of the box, listening to the applause which only swelled to enthusiasm when Bergman appeared before the curtain ; then I hurried through the still empty corridor to go behind to Jenny. At a bend in the staircase two men were talking, and I overheard a deep, clearly-articulate voice ask with interest : " Mr. Hoofft, who is that girl playing Marieke ? " and before the secretary had time to answer, my cry of surprise caused the speaker to turn, for I had immediately recognized the voice and supple movements of Lucas Veraart.

" Whatever brings you here ? "

He pressed my hand laughing and made a gesture towards Hoofft.

"An actor out of work is always thankful for light and warmth gratis," he said. "Mr. Hoofft here, with whom I was formerly associated in connection with his Academy Committee, kindly sent me a ticket." He turned again towards the student and repeated his previous question. "Who is that girl? Do you know her? Can you introduce me to her?"

"Come with me," I said, my heart leaping at this unimagined opportunity. "I know her. I was just going to her."

"Miss Heysten is a protégée of Miss Schepp's," explained Hoofft with a bow as we ran down the stairs, Veraart, in his old friendly manner, drawing my arm through his.

"Is it a fact?"

I laughed upon hearing the familiar phrase, gazing meanwhile at the animated clear-cut features, characteristic as a Dürer engraving, but with the skin already spoilt by the continual use of make-up, and half nervously, I ventured to put the question which I was burning to ask.

"Did you think her good then? Do you, too, believe in her talent? It was her first appearance this evening. She has never acted in public before."

"But she's nothing compared to Bergman," put in Hoofft, anxious that the hero of the evening should not forego his meed of praise. "Didn't you think the inn scene quite brilliant with all those quaint peasant dances?"

"Excellent," said Veraart with a careless move-

ment with which he always set the seal on a sarcasm, "excellent—in a revue."

Hoofft looked annoyed. The actor laughed again and clapped him on the back. "It's a first-rate performance," he declared good-naturedly; "all honour to the illustrious Dirk, who must have drilled them all like Prussian recruits. Arms and legs as though on wires and 'genuine laughter, no deadheads,' as the critic of the local paper will assure its readers to-morrow."

We walked through the narrow passages towards the dressing-rooms. . . . Hoofft gazed longingly at the half-open door of the green-room where the sonorous voice of Manders could be heard above the chatter of the girls. "Would you like to come in too?" he asked us politely, but Veraart motioned "No," and slipped into a corner behind the door with a comical expression of alarm: "No fear, not for this Johnny. The great man would be sure to think I did not make enough fuss of him," and then with the speed which was one of the charms of his personality, he drew me to the other end of the passage close to the stage door, and persisted: "Now first tell me how they came by that girl, and why they were idiotic enough to choose that play?"

"Both thanks to me."

"Is it a fact?" He burst out laughing at my long face, and thrust his fingers through his already thinning hair.

"My hat! Well you could hardly have made a worse choice if you'd tried. Why on earth didn't you suggest 'Dr. Klaus,' or 'Billeted' to those people

instead of allowing them to attempt anything so delicate and fine as that old play ? ”

“ Did you think it such a failure then ? ”

“ Oh, no. In its own way, considered as an amateur performance, it's quite good. Manders must have worked like a nigger. Everyone is word-perfect and that Bergman is really as supple as an acrobat. But there's only one who has the slightest conception of its delicacy, its intrinsic charm, and that's this girl. She's really acting on her own quite a different play from the others. Sometimes she acts exactly as Manders has taught her, and then it's coarse, ugly, conventional ; but when she's original, it's coy, timid—and glorious ! ”

He had spoken irritably with rapid movements of his bony hands as though squeezing something between them, and he now pointed out with a grim expression a group of fully-costumed artists, one of whom drew the cork of a champagne bottle with a resounding pop.

“ Strange,” said he so loudly that he could be heard all over that hollow resonant space, “ that people should fancy they can act just because they have learnt to commit verses to memory and have donned fine costumes.”

One of the group looked up furiously, but at the same moment I noticed Jenny beckoning to me. She pushed her glass into the hand of one of the others and came hastily towards me. “ Have you seen anything of Nico ? Have you any idea where he is ? I'm so afraid he's angry with me because I sent him away just before it began.”

But I was not at all concerned about Nico's possible anger. I caught Jenny by the shoulder and turned her towards Veraart, who stood aside taking her in with his keen penetrating eyes as though observing every line of her body. "Jenny, this is an old friend of mine who wants to be introduced to you."

She looked up with her former self-consciousness and made a brusque movement of escape while he, without a trace of his previous aplomb and impudent gaiety, held out his hand and muttered something like a bashful school-boy. A painful silence followed and lasted so long that to put an end to it I began wondering audibly about Nico's possible displeasure. Suddenly, however, Veraart with a wave of his hand thrust his fingers through his hair, shook back his head with a : "Ye gods, how young you are ! What a child still ! Is it a fact that this is the first time you've ever been on the stage ? "

Jenny smiled shyly. "The first and the last time I think."

The loose skin of his face creased into indignant wrinkles.

"Is that because of the gentleman about whom you made such anxious inquiries just now ? " and as she flushed brightly under her make-up, he waved away an imaginary obstacle with his restless hands. "You don't believe that yourself. You were born for the stage. Remember what I am telling you to-night. You will surely make good."

The old fear of mockery appeared in her eyes as she incredulously contradicted him. "Oh, no—I don't know how—I don't know how to do it in the least !

Why they laughed! They laughed at Marieke all through, and it's so sad, so frightfully tragic and sad. Marieke is only wicked because she is the devil's woman and therefore in his power. She knows she is bad and she can't help herself because she can't get away from him. I felt it like that, and I wanted to make the audience feel it too. But if they had understood they couldn't have laughed."

Veraart stood facing her, and his eyes forced her shy ones to look up at him.

"I understood," he said, with the soft warm intonation which conveyed conviction even more than words. "I felt the tragedy of it. It brought tears to my eyes. Perhaps I was the only one; or there may have been one or two others; or even ten. Take this from me—act for the two or three, for the few who live in it, who understand. The others don't exist. If only those few are present, it's all right, it's delightful to be an actor; but if there are none, not a single one in a full house like this, then it is hell!"

We were alone, the noisy performers had disappeared and the hollow space behind the stage seemed quite deserted. Completely enthralled, Jenny stood listening to Veraart.

"Yes," she said drawing a deep breath, "it was indescribably thrilling sometimes. Then it was like living in another world—like floating away from—above one's self. Oh, not all the time; at first it was horrible. I could only feel the strange clothes, the make-up, and it seemed as though the audience was a thick moving wall from which something hostile was thrown out to me. It was only when I was alone with

the devil that I really forgot myself. Then I actually felt afraid, so that my knees shook, and yet I was somehow attracted to him. And afterwards in the last scene, when Marieke reflects, and feels remorse—it's funny, but I absolutely forgot I was acting, I really felt recklessly wicked and eternally accursed, wanting to be different and yet not being able to, because I loved Moenen, and was therefore powerless to free myself."

Veraart threw me a triumphant glance while his face lighted up with the enthusiastic expression which made it so attractive.

"Exactly! Exactly!" he cried quickly. "That is true acting even although there are many of a different opinion, who believe that the true way is to hold themselves aloof from their performance as it were. I don't believe in that. If one is not capable of feeling really mad in an ecstasy of joy or sorrow for one moment, of seeing Heaven open before one or of shedding real tears, then it's not the true thing. And if you, the first time, are able to feel like that—Good God—It's so glorious—so glorious—and yes—so unutterably difficult, this art of ours, even although every pretty girl who dons smart clothes does think it quite simple. There's positively no other art which so impresses itself upon the human mind, no other able to awaken in humanity so much that is noble and elevated. It will reform the world when people have learnt to listen to it."

I noticed what a powerful impression his words were making upon Jenny, and thought it high time to temper them with a little of my own common sense.

“ We are still a long way off from the time when the stage will only awaken lofty and noble feelings in humanity.”

Once more he made his wide gesture of enthusiasm, threw back his head and began striding up and down the creaking boards.

“ It will come. It shall come. We will force the public to listen to true art, to watch true acting. We, the younger ones, are fed up with substitutes, success-hunters, speculators who pander to inferior instincts, we are sick and tired of theatrical managers who think only of filthy lucre and who poison the public mind with mere amusement which is empty and frivolous. Thousands of beautiful things have been written. Goethe, Lessing, the classics—who is there in our country who knows anything about them? No one dares to act them. The playgoing public does not like them. We have young playwrights and there are many everywhere, in England, France and Germany, who have written fine plays, but not a single manager will produce them because they are not what the conventional playgoer demands. That must all be altered. We will change it, we who are going to form a new company next year without a manager and wife, without a star who wants all the showy parts for herself, but a small group of serious ones, who really desire an artistic theatre and who will not be satisfied with less than the ‘ *highest*.’ ” He suddenly stood still and caught Jenny’s hands in his. “ You come to us—do. We want people like you. You have talent—perhaps—I am almost certain of it—even great talent. You are only a beginner. You were groping in your

part this evening. You hesitated, but, thank God, you are not yet spoilt by routine and the superficial little tricks of the 'profession.' As yet everything is spontaneous about you. I will be your stage manager and will teach you, will bring out the best that is in you. Come to us. We will play this same Marieke together so that they shall not laugh, those people in front, but the tears shall pour from their eyes!"

As though hypnotized, Jenny stood staring at him, while I, conquered as usual by the enthusiasm with which he always surmounted every obstacle, put aside the objections to which nevertheless I was not blind. Nico, the Heysten parents—after all, what did they matter at this moment which was to decide Jenny's destiny?

But just then sounds of approaching footsteps, voices were to be heard, and one of the stage hands came up to Jenny. "Mr. Maes is looking for you everywhere, Miss. All the artists are in the green room. The Jonkheer has been looking for you a long time."

The spell was broken. Jenny's eyes blinked nervously as she freed her hands from the clasp of the actor with an impatient gesture. "Where is the Jonkheer, did you say?" The man pointed to the wings. With a shy glance and muttered excuse Jenny fled, her velvet train leaping behind her like some wild, dancing thing.

Veraart and I, each with a feeling of having made ourselves appear ridiculous, gazed at one another. "You're too late," said I with a derisive little laugh.

"Why? Because of that boy?" he cried angrily.

“ Good God, is that any reason ? Is it impossible for two people working to love one another ? Is the only condition upon which he can marry that girl her consent to disown her talent, to swear that nevermore will she desire to accomplish anything loftier than to darn his socks or to look after his children ? You know her, so you naturally know the young fellow too. You convince him that he must not try to hold her back, that she’s a born actress, that the stage is her vocation, her destiny.”

I shook my head in discouragement. For me, too, the spell had been broken ; reviewing soberly all the facts, it seemed as though it would be just as impossible to convince Nico as to imagine that Jenny’s parents would ever give their consent to such a project. Veraart walked angrily away in the direction in which Jenny had disappeared, saying : “ Well then, I’ll do it myself. Where is the youngster ? I’ll talk to him until I have convinced him.” I ran after him and caught him by the arm. He never recognized a limit when once carried away by temperament and enthusiasm. For problems beyond his artistic insight he had neither sympathy nor comprehension.

“ Wait and see,” I advised as I escorted him past the groups of loitering performers, who stared curiously at us. “ Your words have made a powerful impression upon her.”

He gazed at me with his restless penetrating eyes, as though to measure by my expression the value of my words, then he, too, made a gesture of discouragement and with one of his unaccountable changes of mood, he laughed and said indifferently : “ After all,

what does it matter? Won't that child be far better off as a respectable, substantial doctor's wife?"

I have never known whether Manders was aware that evening of Veraart's presence in front, or had been told of his conversation with Jenny. But in any case it was a fresh proof of how well he knew his audience when at the end of the play, after a self-conscious member of the committee had hung a huge laurel wreath round his neck, he took Jenny's hand and drew her with him to the front of the stage close to the footlights, humbly allowing the storm of applause to pass over his bowed head, and then with a good-natured smile, in itself worthy of a visit to the theatre, withdrew into the background, leaving the last honours to his companion.

And in memory I see once more her face, smaller than ever in its close-fitting nun's cap, change to an almost fearful, incredulous joy. I see her tremulous lips, her darkly-deep eyes shining with the first overwhelming delight of success. But her timid glance searches among the waving rows, and the joyful light in her eyes suddenly fades, the corners of her mouth droop as the curtain is rung down for the last time. For sitting up straight and motionless against the red wall of a box, I caught sight of Nico with an expression of mingled anger and sorrow upon his pale sombre face.

CHAPTER III

IT was a cold wet day in November when, late in the afternoon, I turned homewards from the library to which I had lately been appointed, and wended my way to my rooms. I walked slowly and listlessly under the spell of diminished love of living which had seized me as so many others after the first emotions and excitement of the war had died away. Wasn't it absurd to be so absorbed in spiritual work, to be digging into, examining the beauty of bygone ages, while so near that hellish struggle continued, and it seemed as though no power would ever again control the world but the dire force of guns and bombs.

The street was muddy and slippery ; I could feel the cold creeping through my thin waterproof to my bent, shivering shoulders. I longed sentimentally for the shelter of my warm, peaceful room as I reached the already lighted window, and entered the fancy goods shop above which I lived.

The landing of my floor at that hour of the afternoon was already in darkness, and I stumbled against some unwieldy object. After pulling up the chain of the defective incandescent gas-mantle, my astonished glance alighted upon an old dusty bulging portmanteau over which had been thrown a soaking wet mackintosh. Whoever could be in my room ? I subdued the feeling of annoyance which every intrusion upon my short

hours of greedily-guarded freedom caused me and opened the door. It was cold in the room, the fading grey daylight struggling through the uncurtained windows. Someone got up from the couch in the corner and came to meet me. A timid husky voice uttered my name. It was Jenny.

I drew her towards the window ; the lingering twilight showed the emaciation of her pale face, in which the eyes glowed brightly, and I recognized how widely apart our lives had drifted since I had come to Amsterdam to take up my new work.

I told her, heartily and cheerfully, how glad I was to see her, and scolded her in motherly fashion for not having lighted the gas-fire. She remained silent and came closer to me, gazing up into my face, one of her cold, limp hands clasped in mine. When I turned and applied a lighted match to the asbestos, she suddenly said, quickly and monotonously, as though repeating a lesson : " Perhaps you will let me sleep here to-night either on the sofa or on the floor. I have run away from home, and I want to go on the stage."

I remember still quite clearly how absurd I felt it to be that my first thought should be the dinner which would be brought up directly, and debated silently whether it would be too late to order another portion. And then the second thought which occurred to me was that Lucas Veraart had left for Germany the week before and thus would not be able, as he had promised Jenny the night of the amateur performance, to take her under his guardianship.

My stove began to glow, the crackling asbestos to

hiss and to emit little blue and red flames ; the child drew herself up to it like a frozen cat. And as I quickly lighted my lamp and dragged the curtains over the window, I noticed her shapeless cotton coat and skirt, her worn-out muddy shoes, her rain-spotted hat ; and the old, almost forgotten affection, the un-reasoning idea of her as belonging to me, of being obliged to look after her, once more welled up warmly within me. Nevertheless, I was fully aware of the responsibility, the menace of difficulties and conflicts, which heavily overweighed the joy of the thought.

" And what of Nico ? " I asked.

" He was mobilized, and is at present in a fortress on the Belgian frontier."

Ah, yes ; the war of course ; the war which had paralysed the stage as well as all other enterprises. What could have possessed Jenny Heysten to try just now when——

" I wrote and told him all about it," she went on, " and explained as well as I could that it cannot be helped. It has to be. And now he must really try to understand." She spoke impetuously and with conviction, but her eyes were averted, her lips trembling.

" And of course your parents know you are here with me ? "

She shook her head, still looking away from me. " I didn't know myself that you could have me. I wanted to see Veraart. I've been walking about all day looking for him, because no one seemed to know his address. They sent me from one theatre to the other."

“ Hadn’t any of them the sense to tell you that he had gone to Germany ? ”

She raised her head with a shock. The feverish exaltation faded from her eyes. “ Germany ? ” she repeated tonelessly. “ For a long time ? ”

I shrugged my shoulders. “ Until things are better here. Over there they are very short of actors, because so many of them are at the front. He was offered a post with Reinhardt.”

As she sat there, her bare thin elbows on her knees supporting her head with her hands, the despair on her pale, tired face went to my heart. “ He promised. He was going to form that new company, and he wanted me. You heard him, too, that night. Don’t you remember how he tried to persuade me ? Besides, he wrote to me twice afterwards.”

“ When was that ? ”

“ Last summer ; once in May, and again in July.”

‘ And what did you answer ? ’

“ The first time I did not write much. I only said it was impossible, because I was engaged, and knew that my fiancé would not approve.”

“ And the second time ? ”

There was a pause. At last Jenny said tonelessly : “ I told him I would try.”

She felt in her pocket and laid a much refolded and crumpled letter upon my lap—years afterwards I found this same letter and saved it ; it was then lying upon the heap which Jenny, leaving my home, had discarded as useless rubbish, which she had not even thought worth the trouble of destroying, but had just thrown away into a corner.

“ You rejected it haughtily with the self-control becoming to the fiancée of a Jonkheer, as of one who having acted just for once as an amusement, would not dream of weighing a good marriage in the scales against it. There was nothing in your letter to show that there was the slightest doubt or struggle in your mind. My offer was refused in the most dignified and correct manner, the manner to be expected from an aristocratic young lady to an actor. And yet Jenny, little Jenny of the shy expectant eyes and small fragile hands which unconsciously you stretch out so widely, as though asking for something, the thought persists in haunting me that you are fighting for something different, something denied you because of the many conventional theories which prevent you from recognizing your own wish. You have always been taught that the stage is a barely recognized institution among the respectable sections of society ; above all, that a girl has lost the right of deciding her own future once she has promised her hand to the man she loves. Good God—what a labyrinth of absurd theories ! How many have there not been who have spoilt their own lives and helped others to the devil because of that damned idea of sacrificing themselves for another’s happiness ! As though it were possible to give happiness to anyone else when one is discontented, living a life against one’s own deepest instincts ? As though that pale compensation could ever be happiness, real glorious happiness, not the diluted quality conjured up by priests and other theologians. Jenny, you fancy now that it would be wicked if you were to take your future into your own hands, to cause the man you

love sorrow by showing him yourself as you really are, and not as he imagines you to be. But don't you understand, my child, that you can never become either a wife or a mother in its fullest sense with that other desire stifled, that longing for a higher, wider life in which one dies a thousand times and is a thousand times re-born, in which one recreates oneself into another being, the artist's life of Beauty and Joy for which so very few are chosen.

"My child, now that I am looking down at these wet gleaming words, I ask myself where in the name of Heaven I have found courage to plead with you like this, to describe the life of the artist as one of Beauty and Joy, I, who have learnt by experience that the life of an artist, or at least that of an actor, is at best a Calvary. And never greater than in this country where art is looked upon as merchandise, or at its highest as a pastime, where every success is accompanied by bitter disillusion, where the bourgeois with his 'time is money' as gospel, looks upon the artist as a rogue and a vagabond. And yet I know that there are many others who yearn for some beauty in their barren lives, long to be able to look up to something above and outside their commonplace routine. For these the stage must be awakened into new life, so that for them it may become a temple of beauty and a 'House of Joy.'

"And of course you know, Jenny, that it is my ideal to be the one to inaugurate this great task. I am calling to the young and enthusiastic to foregather and I call you also—for the last time. You are necessary to me because of the pure natural feeling for

rhythm which is part of you, for the intuitive beauty of your gestures, for all the restrained fervour dormant within you and which I shall endeavour to awaken.

"It is my last plea—a poor one because the indefinable quality of the spoken word is lacking. What is a year out of a whole life to one as young as you? Try it for a year. If the man you love really understands anything about you, he dare not keep back from you the chance of this trial. . . ."

It was a typical letter, typical also because of its thick script-like writing with its notes of exclamation and its three or four times underlined words. But all his enthusiasm left me cold, even although I knew that had the writer of them said the same words to me in his own warm penetrating voice, he would certainly have won his cause. I remembered grimly our farewell interview of barely a week since, when he had apparently forgotten all this idealism, all those big plans and, full of grievances against our stage, had compared it with that of Berlin, talking of nothing but his splendid offer from Reinhardt. He had not mentioned a word about Jenny or his correspondence with her.

I refolded the fateful letter and laid it on Jenny's lap while she still sat silent, gazing into the fire. Her face now wore the old lifeless expression which made it appear ugly, almost repellent, but when she turned her head and lifted her heavy eyelids, there was something of the hurt, desperate questioning of a cowed animal in her eyes which conquered my wise reserve and forced me to try to help her. Among my uncertain

recollections one stood out distinctly—that night of the students' performance months ago. I had then positively expected and, I knew now, hoped that Jenny would break with the spoilt selfish youth so unsuited to her, who had not the slightest inkling of the joy that night had been to her, but had only sulked and grumbled at what he himself had lost by it and, as we were driving home in the brougham, had already decreed autocratically: "It's happened just this once—but never again!" He had not even uttered one word of congratulation on her triumph.

But at the same time I remembered another incident of that night. After the oppressive silence of that miserable supper, as I was passing through the hall to go up to bed, I saw them both silhouetted against the frosted glass of the swing door, and her arms were around his neck, her mouth was seeking his with a sensuality which utterly repulsed me and caused me to scorn myself once more for my naïve belief in Jenny as different from the sensual, characterless child which every now and then she had proved herself to be. Afterwards everything had continued as before in the old house. A strict silence was maintained about the play as of some unpleasant event, and when in July I had said good-bye to them all for good, Mrs. Heysten was embroidering coronetted monograms, while Nico and Jenny had been busy discussing patterns for tablecloths as though their salvation had depended upon them . . .

I got up and sat down again upon the arm of the chair in which the girl lay huddled.

"We will find something else for you until Veraart

comes back. Perhaps Manders may have a part for you."

I only suggested this, hoping to see the cowed look disappear from her eyes, and yet, when she merely nodded, and her mouth relaxed, as though convinced that this would be quite easy, I felt somewhat irritated and severely cross-examined her. "First you must tell me how it all came about. I understand from what you say that you have not broken off your engagement with Nico, and this idea of yours of persuading him to allow you a year's trial seems to me too optimistic."

It was some minutes before the halting words came.

"Perhaps you may be able to understand it a bit. At home no one does. They all accuse me of being wicked for grieving Nico now that he is so far away and having such a rotten time in that fort. As though I'm not grieved about it too! As though it's not the worst thing that can happen for anyone you love to be disappointed in you. And I can quite understand that he is. When he was at the hospital and used to come to see me every day I began to understand that it must have been horrid for him to see his future wife acting as a fallen woman. And, besides, there were so many other things to think about—which house we should take—how we should arrange it, where we should go for our honeymoon. And when Veraart's first letter came, I even felt glad to think that I had promised Nico, on the night of Marieke, that I would not act any more. It made me feel like a novice who has made her final vows and taken the

veil—the feeling that for her the struggle is over for ever. Before writing his thesis, Nico went to do some work at a London hospital. He was there when war broke out, and after that everything was different. I did not care about the house any more or anything belonging to it. I seemed to see it as a hollow, empty space where I should be alone, wandering about in it hour after hour, day after day, lonely and bored. It did not seem delightful to be married any more. I should have so little time with Nico, and when he was away it would be like living in prison. I began to learn verses, to act for myself again and knew that I was doing it differently, better than before, so that by degrees I felt I had a grievance against Nico for having made me promise not to act any more, a promise he had forced from me when I was in his arms, when he kissed me, because I know now that I should never have promised in cold blood or in writing. And then Veraart's second letter came. You can imagine, Miss Schepp, what an impression it made upon me, especially as he seemed to feel from a distance how I was worrying, not knowing my own mind. And his idea seemed such a good solution. A year's trial while our marriage was postponed on account of the war. So I tried to explain it all to Nico, to write to him with as much conviction as Veraart had done to me. I asked him to absolve me from the promise I had made him. He could not understand it at all. After all, how should he? How can one plead for such a thing in a letter when as Veraart says, the sound of the voice is lacking. It only made Nico frightfully angry and indignant. He did not even take it seriously, but thought my

nerves were unstrung because of the war and consequent postponement of our wedding. He asked me whether I could imagine a girl who was really in love with a man ever wanting to be anything else but his wife and comrade, the mother of his children, and what's more, had I thought of what arrangements I should make for our life together when the contemplated year's trial were ended?

"By the same post he wrote to mother, warning her against someone outside who was persistently exercising some pernicious influence over me, putting fantastic ideas into my head, and you can imagine what it was like when the bomb burst in that direction!"

I laughed nervously at the failure of her attempt at a grand indifference. "Had you never mentioned Veraart's letters or anything of what he had proposed to you on the night of the theatricals?"

"No, not before. But then I was obliged to, because at home they naturally thought that yours was the 'pernicious influence.'"

The "naturally" seemed to express a great deal.

"And the result?"

With a jerk she straightened herself. "The result," she repeated clenching her small hands, "was that for once and all I understood that I don't belong to them, but to Veraart, to you, and to those others who demand that 'something more' from life, and that two people can still love one another—for in spite of all, we do, Nick and I—and yet be as widely separated as though each were standing on the opposite side of a stream. Nico cannot understand any more than

father, mother or any of the people with whom I have spent my life up till now, that such a longing is not mere fancy or affectation, because to them all art is only an amusement or a pastime, and they consider the work of their brains or their hands far superior to that of an actor's. Had I begged for music or painting, they would have thought it a foolish whim, but they might perhaps have given their consent. But the stage, an actress—for them it means only just that one thing—a strange man who touches you, who kisses you, to whom you may have to utter words of love, desire, passion, things of which a nice young girl should be ignorant. They can't get over that. They think it a sort of prostitution, as Nico called it that evening of the Students' performance, and believed it could hardly have been worse for me if I had had to stand naked before all those people."

"And yet you were able to persuade them?"

She made a gesture of discouragement with her still clasped hands. "You know pretty well what they are like at home. And I'm not good at reasoning and explaining. They get the better of me at once with their plausible arguments. I stuck persistently to my wish, that as in any case we could not be married at present on account of the war, I wanted that year's trial. Because, after all—that's the funny part of it—my common sense agreed with them in many ways; it may be perhaps because of those generations of ancestors who had always been so correct and dignified, and who always obeyed their common sense instincts. Yet—yet—stronger than common sense and the duty to one's parents so ingrained in us Heystens, is that

other side which I only feel when I am acting for myself parts like Mary Stuart, Ophelia, Iphigenia, or when I used to sit on the stool by the fire in your room, or that night when Veraart said that acting was the highest and most delightful of all arts, the feeling of compulsion, of being unable to resist—as though it were not I at all, but something wiser with more insight than myself forcing me to that decision.”

I was unconsciously stroking her thin shoulders as she crept closer to me like a lost, frozen little bird. And again I had the former strong feeling as though she belonged to me and some force was driving me to help and support her.

“But, my dear, you told me you had run away from home. Wasn’t that foolish and hasty of you? Surely in the end you could have come to some arrangement with them.”

She shook her head angrily. “Mother insisted upon my asking Nico’s forgiveness, and father wanted me to give him Veraart’s letters, and said he would consult a lawyer about them. That’s the worst of it. They all think there’s something mean and base at the bottom of it, that because he is an artist, an actor, he was only using pretty phrases to lure me into his net. It’s simply impossible for them to imagine that it’s purely love and enthusiasm for art itself.”

The entrance of my landlady interrupted my indignant answer. I observed her curious, critical glance at Jenny, who, I suddenly remembered with misgiving, had uttered the last words in such a loud voice that they must have been overheard upon the stairs and landing. I looked on with a guilty ex-

pression as with apparent, but restrained indignation she removed the wet hat and cat-like fur from the table, and began to lay it for dinner. At the same time I fell from my lofty mood of artistry into a thorny bush of commonplace problems. In a moment the not too-ample one person's portion would appear, and where on earth was Jenny to sleep to-night? My landlady, however much she may have felt convinced of her artistic temperament in the region of fancy articles, would certainly refuse any co-operation in a bohemian dragging about of pillows and blankets, while I, with my regular, clock-like, work-installed arrangements, was entirely lacking both in resource and desire towards the adventurous and unexpected.

Mrs. Verspies uttered no word as to any possibility of extra coverings, while I, quite vanquished, dared not ask for any, and Jenny with Heysten thoughtlessness, rested her wet, muddy shoes upon the immaculate brass fender, secure in feeling that some arrangement would be made. The dish was put down in its usual place and the odour of roast meat and vegetables filled the room. Jenny's downcast little face became more life-like, her dull eyes lighted up. "Oh, dear," she exclaimed, sniffing greedily, "I'm so hungry, I've had nothing to eat all day." She got up out of the deep chair, and it was only when she was standing under the lamp that I could see the grey pallor of her little face, the dark shadows under her eyes, the bluish-white of her lips. I did not hesitate any longer, but pushed her into my chair and filled her plate, cutting up the meat for her.

"But what of yourself?" she cried hesitatingly, but without ceasing to eat.

I laughed. "Oh, I'm not at all hungry, and, as you see, have grown much too fat these last months. You're really doing me a kindness in absolving me from the necessity of eating all this."

She giggled with schoolgirl meekness at my little joke. "You ate very little when you were with us," she agreed, and after that no sound was to be heard in the room but the tinkling of fork and knife, or an occasional sigh of satisfaction. And I sat opposite her watching her, calling myself a fool, but at the same time feeling more happy and contented than I had felt for months. After she had finished up all the rice and raspberry syrup, too, and Mrs. Verspies had with a sphinx-like expression cleared away, Jenny came to the chair by the fire in which I lay meditating, and throwing her arms around my neck cried with her old passionate tenderness: "Oh, you darling, wasn't it silly of me to be afraid of coming to you at first? I was so frightened you'd be angry—or rather that you'd be cool or disdainful."

By this time she had squeezed herself in next to me, and my fingers were stroking the ruddy hair, untidy and neglected as it had been during her school days. "Why should I be?" I asked feeling touched.

She looked up with eyes suddenly hard and bright, gazing into my face. "You were angry before; about Nick. You were jealous when I fell in love with him after being so gone on you," and, skilfully anticipating my indignant protest: "I mean I was horrid to you. I neglected you because of Nick. I

thought of nothing but him and myself, but now I know I'm just as fond of you as ever."

I was hardly aware of the nature of my own feelings. Tenderness, but humiliation also. "*On y revient toujours*," I said, half in fun. With a sudden shock she raised the head which had been resting against my knee, and said despairingly: "But surely you don't think it's all over between me and Nick? It's not in the very least. He will understand. He must."

But she could read the doubt in my face, and continued even more emphatically, as though her salvation depended upon my belief.

"It's not over. He's not broken it off, even if he is angry."

"Not yet," said I, "because he still thinks that probably nothing will come of your venture. You must however take into consideration, Jenny, that Nico is not the sort of man to put up with anything of that kind."

"Oh, yes, he will," she contradicted obstinately. "He will when he understands how serious I am about it, that I must do it. Heaps of men not actors themselves, marry actresses. He can't do without me, any more than I can do without him." All at once she broke out into wild, despairing sobs, crying like a child who has to go without something which it has been promised. Powerless to comfort, I thought of Nico, and of what a solution it would be if only he were here to take Jenny in his arms, to fasten his mouth upon hers and make her promise for good and all to have nothing more to do with the stage. But Nico was in a fortress at the frontier and was probably

composing a difficult letter full of reproaches by which he would gain nothing, just as the Heysten parents with their anger and threats had but hastened the *dénouement* of the drama.

An hour later, Jenny lay in the bed in my little room adjoining, and I had arranged pillows and my travelling rug on the divan in readiness for myself. She was so utterly exhausted that I had dosed her with Eau de Carmes and undressed her as though she had been a little child. Sitting in my strangely silenced room, I could hear how she still occasionally sobbed in her sleep. And I myself, dead-tired and in the grip of a severe headache, plodded through a letter to Jenny's parents, a letter which should be polite and tactful enough to cool their indignation and at the same time firm enough to make them understand that Jenny was in earnest and had not taken this step merely as the result of a sudden whim or still less been influenced by meretricious proposals.

"Do try to understand that a calling such as your daughter has for the stage is stronger than anything of a social or material nature and can never be argued away. Jenny has undeniable gifts, as was amply demonstrated at the performance last spring when Lucas Veraart, one of our best actors, was so impressed as to offer to train her for the stage. I have taken her under my care for the present because I firmly believe her to have a great future before her. I trust that you, her parents, will not try to militate against this in any way. The time is past when a girl was considered to have degraded herself if she went on the stage. Many women of the highest standing abroad

and here also, have chosen it as their calling. Not only do I expect you to give your sanction to her venture, but also the financial support which at first will be necessary."

I read this letter over and over again, cast a hasty glance over the little pile of my previous attempts, and a vision arose to my mind of Mrs. Heysten and what she would look like when she should read this message of pleading. What did the words "calling," "gifts," signify to her with whom the disgrace alone counted—the disgrace to Nico and his aristocratic family, the humiliation to her own ancient name, the only sign of former grandeur intact up till now? And I could see the disdainful, momentary smile flickering upon the delicate lips at my assumption of financial aid. What would Jenny's parents do? After eighteen months spent under their roof I fancied I knew them pretty well. They would not capitulate, but neither would they exercise their power to force Jenny, who was not of age, to return. In spite of Mrs. Heysten's unbending pride, she was too indolent and indifferent to exert herself to support it, and it was by far the easiest thing under these circumstances to adopt an aggrieved attitude, to accept the inevitable, to wash her hands of Jenny, thus driving her to the shelter of my roof. In this way their honour would be maintained, because they would be able to assert that of my own free will I had taken this burden upon myself.

My fine phrase regarding "financial aid" seemed all at once to have become absurd. What could their position be like now during this war-time retrenchment? Jenny had herself in course of conversation,

told me that Timon had given up his studies in ancient languages to go into an office, and that for some time they had been without a servant. Even if they wished, what could these people, with their biting poverty and offended pride, spare for Jenny's career? My enthusiasm wavered and died. What was I to do? How could I in my solitary, peaceful life of study take upon myself the responsibility of a temperamental young girl in that world of danger, the stage. The post office was but a few yards further than the pillar-box. Instead of sending this letter, still safe in my hands, I could send a wire—"Jenny here, fetch her to-morrow," and then the whole oppressive incident would be over and done with.

Nervously, I pushed back my chair and began to pace up and down the room. The rug on the couch, the plate with its two plain slices of bread and butter, which I had intended as a substitute for my lost dinner, suddenly assumed the appearance of grim symbols. I should lose my freedom, the material independence conquered after so many struggles. I should be forced to concentrate my thoughts upon Jenny's career instead of upon my own, to sacrifice all my modest desires to provide her with necessities, even if it were only for a few months until Veraart's return. Was it not foolish of me to take all this upon myself for a year's trial as the child herself proposed, while after a few weeks she might perhaps regret it, or it might be that after all her supposed gift was not of a sufficiently high order for success in the profession.

But then I passed through the door of communica-

tion to the bedroom, and by the light of my green shaded reading-lamp gazed down upon her face. A child's face, the countenance of some sleeping youth in its frame of short locks, pathetic in its almost transparent pallor with the dark shadows of sorrow and fatigue under the heavy closed eyelids.

What was the complex feeling which at that moment decided Jenny's destiny and my own? Innate compassion, Nature's unsatisfied longing to bestow maternal love and protection? It was all that, but most of all the perception that I too now belonged, as Jenny had explained just now, to those who ask that "something more" of life.

For even if I were never to become a creative artist myself, my love for art was great and strong, as were my reverence for the artist and my faith in his right to fulfil his destiny.

I knew that what had driven Jenny to her momentous decision was no love of adventure but the instinct of one who never reasoned but who could not live without that "something more," and the force which drove her to it was a true vocation.

I took up my letter to the Heystens which lay on my blotter next to one in which I had allayed Nico's anxiety, and ran down the stairs.

CHAPTER IV

JENNY exhibited one side of her artistic temperament with unmistakable distinctness the following morning by her absolute ignorance and indifference regarding financial matters when I tried to arrange some scheme for our mutual existence. I had often noticed this sovereign contempt for money in the ever insolvent Heysten household. The price of things was never mentioned. Jenny who had always been taught to curb her desires, had during her engagement accepted as a matter of course Nico's expensive presents, the taxi-drives and good dinners, in the same way as she had previously accepted her twopence a week pocket-money and her shabby grey frocks. Of course she was without a farthing when she appeared at my place ; it was by the merest accident that she had discovered a few shillings in the pocket of one of the coats Nico had left behind, just enough to pay for her railway ticket. But she was quite convinced that as soon as she appeared upon the stage, all material difficulties would vanish as by magic.

With a tactful camouflage of the facts, I managed to persuade the landlady to let Jenny have a little bedroom on the top floor, to supplement the commissariat, and to lay a place for her at my table. I

did not discuss terms with Jenny. According to the Heysten point of view, this would have been bad form, but I knew she intended making me some royal compensation as soon as she was earning something. In that respect she has remained unchanged. She has never gained a clear understanding of money matters. She always considered herself to be rich as long as she carried a purse containing a few shillings, and as soon as it was empty, encroached upon someone else's without the slightest scruple. As with boastful carelessness she would thrust her bills away into a drawer and forget all about them, so she always felt like a millionaire at the beginning of the month with her just-paid salary burning a hole in her pocket, and I had the greatest difficulty in dragging her away from the shop windows where she singled out presents for me and for innumerable others, rejoicing meanwhile in all the pretty and delicious things she could buy if she chose. Perhaps even in those early days when I was so necessary to her, she may have been acting a part, but if so, my lonely heart was warmed by her affectionate dependence, so that in spite of the cares with which she invested me, I have seldom felt so happy as during the time when I worked hard to pay for her expensive stage frocks and lived with her through her first experiences upon the boards.

She had written a letter to Manders asking him for an interview, and two days later his reply came telling her to come to his theatre the following afternoon. It was November and already very cold, but Jenny was still walking about in a straw hat and a cotton coat and skirt. The portmanteau containing all her pos-

sessions delivered up a shabby dark blue serge which was wearable only after I had sacrificed a whole morning's work at the library to iron it out and eradicate its stains. With the aid of a fine lace jabôt, sent to me from Paris by a friend, but discarded as too showy for my wear, I was able to conjure away all signs of her unsightly flannel blouse. But my inexperienced hands found no remedy for her limp, shapeless hat with its rubbishy flowers, and I am fully aware, alas, that I that day, in a small but alluring hat shop, laid the foundation stone of Jenny's notorious vanity and love of beautiful clothes.

The smart, eccentric, yet charming little hat, designed probably for some Parisian cocotte, suddenly transformed the little provincial with whom I had entered the shop into an attractive and even seductive young person who—this I observed with fear and annoyance—attracted the admiring glances of all the young and old members of the masculine sex in the street. It was made of glossy silver-green velvet, deeply overshadowing the eyes, with a huge purple *chou* upon one side and a velvet ribbon artfully framing the oval of the face. The saleswoman who displayed it somewhat hesitatingly after having first shown us a couple of dark, serviceable models, asked an exorbitant price for it, more than I spent on my own hats during the whole year; but the sight of Jenny's face in the glass vanquished all scruples. It was first her incredulous amazement, and then her triumphant delight; but the thought also occurred to my foolish and inexperienced brain that surely Manders would not be able to refuse any request from the laughing,

pleading grey eyes peeping out from under the brim. So I nodded affirmatively to her hasty persuasive whisper "to lend her the money," left the rain-stained rag to the mercy of the now deferential attendant, and accompanied Jenny with the hat out of the shop on the way to Manders' theatre—a Jenny treading with fairy-like steps, her voice sounding higher and clearer, her merry girlish laugh attracting the attention of the passers-by, quite another Jenny from the dependent child whom I had enveloped in my care during the last few days . . .

"It's all thanks to the hat," she cried excitedly an hour later, rushing down the steps of the theatre to where I was standing patiently doing sentry duty.

"They've taken me on, Mr. Manders and Mr. Bierman, who is really the stage manager. They were so nice, not a bit severe or stuck-up. I recited a bit of Shakespeare and something out of *Célimène*; but I don't think they even listened. Of course Mr. Manders began about "Marieke," how he had at once noticed that I had something in me, and had drawn Veraart's attention to it. I naturally did not contradict him. They wouldn't listen to anything about Veraart. They called him the Sequah of the stage, who wants to cure all diseases, but only as an advertisement for himself; and when I told them of his plan for last summer, and how he had gone off to Germany, they looked at one another, and Bierman said, 'You ought to be glad. Yours would not have been the first talent to have been spoilt by him.'"

"Why did you mention Veraart?" I asked crossly. "It had nothing to do with them. Now Manders,

who hates him because he is jealous of him, will stone him to his heart's content."

Jenny laughed scornfully, pursing up her lips. "Why shouldn't I?" she cried fiercely. "I hope they do hate and stone him. I believed in him as though he were an apostle. His voice seemed to mesmerize me, even those words in his letters. And then he forgot me as though I had never existed. I only hope they do stone him. I believe Manders is right when he calls him the quack of the stage, and that it is all self-advertisement, or he would not have treated me as he has done."

"And after all what is the result of your visit?"

She beamed once more, pinching my arm in nervous delight. "He has taken me on. He said girls with a good appearance—that's only due to the hat—always have a good chance on the stage, and Mr. Bierman said he relied upon my dressing well, as they were putting on a French play in which I might have a small part. And just think, I'm to have three pounds a month during the run of the piece!"

To me the result did not seem very wonderful. Still, even if she had no certain contract, and in spite of the fact that three pounds a month would not buy much in the way of French elegance, was it not rather satisfactory as a beginning, although that same evening a haughty letter addressed to me by Mrs. Heysten arrived, stating that if Jenny persisted in her extraordinary decision, she must not rely upon any forgiveness or support from her parents. "We do not consider ourselves as under any obligation," was written in pale uncertain ink upon yellowing crested

notepaper, "to help our daughter in a direction which can only have a bad effect upon her character, and which will bring shame and dishonour to our name, the only thing of value still left to us."

I did what I could to drive Jenny's thoughts away from this letter which seemed to cast over us the spirit of the Heysten house. I brought out my books and began to give her a lesson in elocution. But I was conscious of her wandering attention, and could hear the uncertain nervous sound in her voice, and suddenly in the middle of Bouten's "Beatry's," she stopped and stared straight in front of her.

"I really ought to take another name. I couldn't bear it myself, seeing the name of Heysten stuck upon a hoarding outside a theatre."

"And suppose later on you were to become famous?" I said for fun.

She sat thinking about it for some time, a painful frown between her eyes, again full of sadness and despair.

"Well, no, not just at first then," was the result of her cogitations.

A few days later when Jenny, full of excited anticipation, had departed for her first rehearsal carrying the blue exercise book containing the few lines of her part, I found, on my return from the library to lunch, Nico Maes walking up and down the street. I noticed his attempt to evade me, and remembered that it was he who had warned Mrs. Heysten against my "pernicious influence," and that since I had written informing him of Jenny's arrival at my home he had

never once written to her. I understood that he was looking for her now but wished to avoid me, and calmly, as though his coming were a pleasant surprise, I crossed over to him. He looked pale and disagreeable and in his stiff, ill-fitting uniform bore little resemblance to the self-conscious "knut" of whose fluent pleasant phrases I had always felt rather uncertain.

"I suppose you are waiting for Jenny," I began, "but she will not be back for some time yet."

"They told me in the shop that she would be sure to be in for lunch," he asserted suspiciously.

"So she has been most days, but to-day she has gone to rehearsal at the Little Theatre for the first time."

He was standing half-turned away from me, but now with a jerk he faced me. "So she's done it after all," he cried threateningly. "Where is the theatre? Which is the nearest way to it?"

Alarmed, I foresaw the chance of his going there and making a scene by which he would gain nothing and would make Jenny appear everlastingly ridiculous in the eyes of her fellow artists.

I took his arm, but he freed himself with an angry movement. "My dear boy, come upstairs with me and let us discuss this matter calmly. In the meantime, Jenny will most likely come home."

"I have so little time," he hesitated. "I had an awful bother to get a day's leave, and if I'm not back in time to-night, shall get C.B."

By this time I had conducted him into the shop and was preceding him up the stairs, talking to prevent him doing so. "I thought no leave was given just

now except upon very special occasions such as illness or death of a relative."

"Well, and isn't this something of the kind?" he said with a short hoarse laugh. "My captain evidently thought so, when I explained it all to him. He's a young chap himself and has a wife he loves, and he seemed to think it just as bad if one's fiancée—I put a warning finger to my lips, with a nod towards Mrs. Verspies' regions, but as soon as he had closed the door of my room behind him, he completed his sentence vehemently—"is lost in the hell of the stage."

But in my peaceful room in which lay Jenny's old work-basket, her coat and some of her favourite books, where the simple lunch was laid for two, his excitement suddenly seemed to be absurdly exaggerated, and he was apparently aware of it, because he continued much more calmly.

"I felt so certain they would not take her at once. Those kind of people make promises so readily. Veraart himself of course did not for one moment believe that she was in earnest."

"She's not with Veraart," I said pointing towards a chair and pouring him out some coffee. "Nothing came of that new company of his because of the war, and he himself has gone abroad."

"But you told me that Jenny——"

"At present she's at the Little Theatre under Manders' management."

At that he sprang up and came towards me with a threatening gesture that made the cup in my trembling hand rattle in its saucer.

"With that fellow! And you allowed her? Per-

haps you even think it an honour, a distinction? But are you really so unsophisticated as not to know what it means when a fellow like that takes a young girl, quite ignorant of the 'profession,' into his company?"

In those days nothing annoyed me so much as to be considered unsophisticated, and I answered haughtily: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Jenny loves you, and it's disgraceful of you to imagine that even if a man like Manders—which I don't believe—were to——"

He interrupted me roughly and began to pace my room which seemed suddenly to have become overfull.

"What does it matter whether you believe it or not? What do women understand about such things? What does a person like you, even if you are ever so clever and learned, understand, what do you ever see of life as it really is? I know you are quite honest in your enthusiasm for the theatre, that you look upon actors as a sort of chosen people, and that you think Jenny will be happier among them all than at home, that she has been granted that gift by Divine favour——"

"Jenny thinks so too," I broke in loftily trying in my turn to annoy him. "But it's impossible for you to judge such a thing. You cannot understand the thoughts and feelings of an artist."

He laughed scornfully.

"When you are not trying to deceive one another you can pretty well reduce that lofty feeling for art to self-desire and ambition. I can believe in the ideals of a poet or a musician, but not in those of an actor—a

comedian. What he arouses of desire for beauty is usually mere sensuality, or else why shouldn't an old and ugly actress have just as good a chance as a pretty one? Come, Miss Schepp, do you think the stage folk themselves believe in it? If that were really so, if they were only desirous of arousing noble emotions, why do all those actresses dress themselves up in a seductive manner, show as much of their necks and legs as they dare and feel flattered when fellows in the stalls and boxes stare and leer at them through their opera glasses? My God—don't you understand, the infernal horror of Jenny being mixed up in it, giving herself up to it? That night of 'Marieke' I heard someone behind me remark that she had pretty legs. I could hardly restrain myself from hitting the fellow, but at the same time knew I was a fool; everyone thought of actresses like that; I had spoken so myself many times about them."

In spite of his almost offensive coarseness, I pitied the boy. Was not his opinion the general one of "sensible" people? Hadn't my own clever and enlightened family in Gröningen, reasoned almost precisely so, when years ago I too had wanted to go on the stage? So I talked to him as calmly and convincingly as I could.

"When you decided to study medicine, Nico, didn't you do so with a sort of feeling of vocation, or at least with the conviction that it was what you wanted to make you happy? Why then do you think it so impossible for a girl like Jenny, even if she should happen to be your fiancée, to feel the same?"

He seemed to feel the force of my words, and sat

thinking, his head between his hands, finally agreeing. "Yes, I can imagine that, even if I have been stupid enough to believe that if a girl is in love with a man, her greatest desire is to become his wife and the mother of his children. I believe I should adapt myself to the circumstances if Jenny had wanted to be a singer or an authoress. But that damned stage! I know more about it than you people imagine. As a student I was awfully fond of the theatre, and at the university was on the committee of the 'Dramatic Society.' As a matter of course we used to go behind the scenes, talk to the actresses, and give them flowers. Afterwards we used to take one or two of the favourite actors off to the inn or to our rooms because they were such good fun and could tell such ripping stories. But do you think it would ever have entered my mind to take my sisters with me when I went behind the scenes, or to invite an actor to my mother's house?"

"And how do you think," cried I indignantly, "the actors and actresses look upon you and your grand friends, who for the most part have not the remotest conception of their art, and imagine yourselves to be conferring an honour upon them when you flirt with them or permit them to give you an evening's entertainment? Don't you think they make fun of you behind your backs, about your insipid conversation, your foolish remarks when you imagine you are making flattering comments upon their acting, your fancying yourselves to be 'somebody' because your father or your grandmother may perhaps have been 'somebody' before you?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," he admitted loftily. "*Bourgeois satisfait* is, I believe, their term of abuse. Well, from all I have seen and heard about their lives, I am quite willing to accept that title. I remember a carouse at a friend's rooms with Teyling—you know, that old comedian, who must be dead or in a sanatorium by now. Well, to hear that gentleman talk about women, particularly young actresses, and what he let out about the members of the profession generally especially after he had had a few glasses of 'Scotch' "——

I laughed derisively under this discourse, every word of which contained a sting, and tried to fight against it for Jenny's sake. "And so you would condemn the whole profession because of that drunkard's gossip?"

Once again he sprang up, "I ask you once more what you know about it? Jenny is a mere child, and that Manders is a seducer. How do I know it? One man always knows that of another if they are but a quarter of an hour in company together, with or without women. Supposing she still loves me—hasn't a fellow like that a thousand ways with him? Isn't she in his power because without it she can't get on? And even if he were to leave her in peace, even if there were not a single one who dared try it on—do you suppose that a young girl can live in the turbid atmosphere of the stage, and not be contaminated by it?"

"I don't know," said I, and refused to utter another word. There was a long and heavy silence, then I heard a sound like a smothered sob from the window

where he was standing, and when I looked up, I could see his manly refined face was drawn with grief.

I went towards him and put my hand upon his stiff grey sleeve. "Just because of what you say you must not give her up," I cried warmly. "You will never persuade her to give it up. And you must see for yourself how much more sensible it is to let her find out for herself that perhaps it's not so wonderful as she imagines. Otherwise she might remain craving for it all her life, as for some unattainable ideal."

It was not for nothing that I had cultivated the science of pedagogics. This was the psychological moment. "If you give her up now," I pleaded still more warmly, "if she were to feel herself free, not bound to you any longer—because she really does feel like that about it, Nico—wouldn't you be responsible if she were to become contaminated by what is evil and dangerous in her environment? She is so fond of you, even if she is not the kind of woman to be satisfied with the care of husband and children as her sole happiness. She has so much to give——"

I noticed the effect of my words, and knew that he was struggling with himself, his love and longing fighting against the rooted instinct of a man who wants to keep what he loves as his own inalienable possession.

"But what of her parents?" he asked, wavering. "Mrs. Heysten will surely never——"

I remembered that last letter. "Oh, Mrs. Heysten," said I scornfully. "After all, what does she really care about Jenny?"

He immediately took advantage of this safe neutral territory. "Ah, so you agree with me in that, at all events; that at the bottom it's all their own fault, that it's simply disgraceful the way in which they neglected Jenny. What sort of life had she—what a bringing up! What would have become of her without me?" He hesitated a moment and I accepted his amendment with humility according to its worth, when he added: "and you?"

I nodded in a motherly manner, and taking advantage of the calmer atmosphere, poured him out a fresh cup of coffee in place of the one which had grown cold. As he seated himself at the table in Jenny's place, I caricatured, with the humour which I called to my aid at this critical moment, Mrs. Heysten, her aristocratic disdain, and the condescension with which she had allowed me to suffer pangs of cold and hunger in her patrician and neglected mansion.

And although he protested, Nico laughed too with unmistakeable satisfaction, while I unobtrusively filled his plate with all the delicacies that our modest table in war-time provided.

Half-an-hour later when he was eating his fifth roll and drinking his fourth cup of coffee, and I was carefully selecting and peeling the biggest apple on the dish for him, it seemed impossible to imagine that a short time ago we had been disputing about such important things as love and life's happiness, that we had stood opposite to one another like beings of different worlds.

The door opened unexpectedly, and Jenny came in. She wore of course "the hat," and a wide grey scarf of mine, with which I had brightened up her plain

blue coat and skirt, and which half hid the lower part of her face up to the tip of her little nose. Above it gleamed her eyes, defiant and triumphant. As she stood thus upon the threshold, with her hand still on the handle of the door, I immediately realized that her attitude of dismayed astonishment was studied and unreal. They had naturally informed her in the shop that there was a visitor upstairs, and she must have seen Nico's soldier's overcoat on the landing outside.

She remained standing like this for a moment as though rooted to the spot in amazement—it was really a perfect stage entrance—then with a slow movement began to unwind the silk scarf until her mouth appeared compressed into a line of forsaken grief, the heavy eyelids drooping, the head sunk slightly to one side. The youth had sprung up, his pale face distorted with painful emotion, and for a few moments there hung over the room a strain which could be felt, the strain of a wordless battle being fought out. Then with two steps, Nico reached the door, drew the still motionless girl towards him, and with an almost savage gesture of possession, threw his arms around her, stammering her name with incoherent tenderness. And she resigned herself to his embrace in silence until, with her head upon his shoulder, her voice, with the sad, deep thrill of a tragic heroine, reproaching him: "Oh! Nico, how could you? How could you be so cruel when you say you love me?"

I had finished with love as a personal experience, but as a problem was it not always complex and interesting? Is every man without exception a fool

and a slave whenever two soft arms are clasped round his neck? All the most intricate problems in life seem reducible to that simple solution. I could hear Jenny sobbing softly, and after subduing a shyness bordering upon aversion, I glanced towards them and saw her face, wet with tears, resting upon his grey shoulder. Was it real after all then, or was love ever more than a supreme comedy such as this, where the actors live so thoroughly in their parts that for them at least it has become a reality? Softly, with the clumsy tenderness of a man, which makes it so touching, Nico wiped her pale wet cheek with his coloured silk handkerchief, the only luxury he still retained with his rough uniform, and I subdued the sentimental lump in my throat with the reflection that the silk handkerchief was useless for the purpose, but that as Jenny's was probably as usual extremely dirty, she wisely kept it hidden. The sobs diminished and died away, and when I heard behind my back the sound of kisses, I got up and went towards the door of my bedroom adjoining. No voice was raised in protest, so I went and sat down in the other room, asking myself for the thousandth time what absurd excess of altruism had possessed me to sacrifice my peace and comfort for Jenny's stage career?

It was late in the afternoon when Nico in a nervous hurry, tore himself away. Half way down the stairs he shouted to his fiancée: "Don't forget to thank Miss Schepp for me," while Jenny, who had just opened the bedroom door to find me sitting with two coats on and sleeping socks drawn over my stockings, swallowed a laugh and repeated the message.

"How did it all go off?" I asked, anxiously, as I warmed my hands before the fire in the sitting-room which was full of cigarette smoke. Jenny was cracking nuts at the still littered lunch table.

"What do you mean?" she asked absently.

"I mean with Nico, of course. Is he satisfied now? Has he made up his mind to make the best of it?"

She threw me a quick sly glance: "Of course. What did you expect him to do?" She cracked another nut with her short sharp teeth thereby cruelly distorting her features.

"Oh, stop that," I ordered her irritably. "You really need not pretend it's such a trifle. I felt quite sorry for the boy myself."

Jenny left the nuts, and came over to perch herself upon the arm of my chair. "You're a dear thing," she said. "Nico thinks so too. He told me all about it, how sweetly you had talked to him, and that's what reconciles him to the plan for the present, my being under your care."

I was struck by the bitter humour of the circumstances. What did that boy with his self-assured convictions understand of the Power which so much more rapidly than my words had pleaded her cause? How little does a person in love know himself!

"And supposing he had not allowed himself to be persuaded, and had broken it off?" I asked sternly.

She did not answer as she played with the jet chain of my pince-nez. I was again struck by the hard triumph in her eyes, when at last she said, tapping her foot against the fender: "He's not that kind of

man, the sort to try and force a woman to do anything against her will."

She then sprang up and with unusual alacrity, began to clear away the plates. "Well, now we won't talk about it any more; you must hear all about this morning. I wanted so much to tell you before, but didn't dare to when Nico was here. He would have taken it up the wrong way. They were all so jolly and kind. They give you the impression of being all one big family having no end of fun together. And just fancy, Lena Terburg, the leading lady, whom I never expected to take any notice of a novice like me, came up and asked me whether I really was a baroness who had run away from home to go upon the stage. They all stood round me in a circle and someone said: 'Well, you'll be sorry for it soon enough,' but Lena Terburg patted me on the cheek and said: 'The stage is like love, my child. One knows beforehand it'll cause one heaps of trouble, and yet one cannot keep away from it.' They all shook with laughter at that, and Manders said: 'Bear that in mind, my dear. Mrs. Terburg is a woman of experience,' and then they laughed all the more. I think Lena Terburg's a dear. She has such beautiful eyes and a fur coat, and she was so sweet to me and said I must come and see her one day and I might always ask her to help me if I were worried about my part; she had not forgotten herself what a lot of difficulties there were to contend with on the stage at first."

"They are all so jolly and kind."

That was the refrain with which Jenny ended all

her infatuated descriptions at first, spicing our meal-times with other stage anecdotes which were not always of the most wholesome variety.

As when formerly she had been rehearsing for "Marieke," she was again full of admiration for Manders who was stage-managing the play in which she was to have a part. She was never tired of talking about his fine acting, his astonishing flair for comic effects and how to get the most out of them.

With anxiety which I refused to acknowledge to myself, I could not help noticing how quickly Jenny seemed to adapt herself to her new existence, to these utterly foreign surroundings; how she had cast off her former subjection and self-consciousness like a skin which had become useless to her, and had adopted an attitude of self-satisfied and noisy ease of voice and manner which I, made wise by experience, supposed to be an imitation of the uncritically admired, almost worshipped, Lena Terburg.

One morning Jenny came into breakfast with a new coiffure, a loose overhanging fringe, and there was another when I detected traces of rouge upon her usually pale cheeks. This was about the time that she started changing, unasked, the submissive "Miss Schepp" or "Miss Margaret" for Greet or Maggie. "On the stage we all call one another by our Christian names," and sometimes she would tease me about my stiffness and propriety, which would have annoyed me greatly had she not made up for it directly afterwards by being extra sweet and affectionate.

I did not hear much about the play itself, nor of the few lines she had to say in it. But I blessed the

Providence which kept Nico in his fortress when Jenny, in more unequivocal terms than I should ever have thought possible from the lips of a Heysten, described its plot, although I observed with satisfaction from her scornful remarks that she estimated the "Powerful Drama" at its true value. As time went on I understood more and more that the Little Theatre was decidedly not a first-class House, and Jenny was forced to appear in poor sorts of plays which drew the general public and as a consequence the box-office receipts also. But in a company which relied for its principal strength upon a Manders and a Lena Terburg, there was plenty for a beginner to learn, and would not the friendship of the great actress be of enormous assistance to her in her future career? She had already asked Jenny to tea twice. Upon the steadily increasing list of "advances" were two lots of roses and one of chrysanthemums for Lena Terburg, but from the scanty accounts of her visits, during which Jenny had been most struck by the portraits of three divorced husbands harmoniously occupying together the top of the same bureau, it was easy to gather that deprived of the aid of footlights and make-up, the diva had not enhanced her previous impression.

I don't know when I first noticed that Jenny's attention began to be concentrated upon the erotic and the sensual, that she no longer sought in the books and plays I still studied with her the ideal and exalted, that love and passion, with their entanglements and conflicts, became the only subjects of any interest to her, and that what thrilled her most was to try to find out whether the loves in the plays and

books were "real," whether they bore any resemblance to those which she witnessed or were related to her daily by her fellow-artists during the intervals of rehearsal.

Her sympathy, in literature at least, was thus readily aroused for those who snatched at happiness, who dared to live their own lives. It took all my practical common sense to exercise any restraint over her enthusiasm for "fiery passions" and "deadly jealousy."

I was able to laugh and joke about this, because in those days it did not seem to be of any importance. It was all so innocent, such childish bragging, and whenever I saw Jenny of the defiant eroticism laboriously composing a long letter to her distant sweetheart, her forehead full of lines, the red tip of her tongue between her half-open lips, she seemed to me younger, more innocent, far less complex than when she uttered such strange, almost perverse thoughts about love and human relationship.

But at the same time it annoyed me more and more to find her evincing a sly, continual interest in my landlady's pale, loutish son whom she suspected of a love affair with the day-girl, and when she informed me with excitement one morning that she was practically certain that the attendant in the flower shop opposite had a liaison with an officer, occupying the rooms above, I was not sparing of my sneers.

"If there's one thing more common than another, it's this everlasting trying to spy upon other people's private affairs," I remarked contemptuously. "Do you who have always had so much to say about the

'commonness' of your fellow artists, think it desirable to copy their bad habits? "

She did not answer, but sat staring out of the window, visibly annoyed. It was the first time during the weeks she had lived with me that I had found it necessary to give her a scolding, and I was at once made to feel how she had outgrown it. For after a pause, her nose in the air, she made some remark about the narrow ideas of some people who went about with their eyes shut and fancied that these things did not exist because they did not choose to see them, and when I, with difficulty restraining my temper, continued the argument, she cut up the remainder of her bread and butter to give to the sparrows, and getting up from the table, came round to where I was sitting, and pressed a kiss upon my glowing cheek.

"Darling old Maggie, don't get excited about it. People like you, with their noses buried in their books, haven't the slightest idea of what goes on in real life, and you wouldn't be such a dear if you were any different."

After this dispute, Jenny unconsciously adopted a good-natured protective manner towards me; that of the experienced worldling for innocent inexperience, and although she kept silence as to any further discoveries about the day-girl and the flower-maiden, she drifted back to the old atmosphere of sultry intrigues and erotic intricacies which excited my loathing and disgust.

I was out a great deal at that time giving a private lesson every afternoon, replacing one of my colleagues

who was ill, and I was glad to be able thus to cover to some extent our rapidly increasing household budget and the doubtful "advances" to Jenny. Once or twice, returning late, I found cigarette ash upon my tablecloth; at another time the room reeked objectionably of scent. Jenny explained that one of her fellow artists had just looked in for a moment.

But a few days later, coming home an hour or two earlier than usual, I could hear the sound of strange voices and as I went upstairs inhaled the heavy scent of perfume and cigarettes. The door of my room was ajar, and I could see from the landing that the table had been pushed back and that, illuminated by the ruddy glow from the fiery asbestos, several figures were sitting in a wide circle on the floor round the hearth. They were nearly all quite young, and they sat listening entranced to one of the circle who was reciting to the thin, tinkling accompaniment of a mandoline. The singer was a young man, almost a youth, with classical features framed in dark, thick waving locks, and he was declaiming with a distinct articulation full of expression, one of those pathetic French cabaret songs at once cynical and sentimental, frivolous and passionate, touching upon the deepest things in life. Charmed and surprised by the lingering cadence and moving refrain I stood listening, then noticed that the singer was sitting next Jenny, his back supported by her drawn-up knees, and as his head bent lower over the instrument, I could see her small face so illuminated in the glow of the fire, so spiritualized, that it seemed as though lighted up from within. I stood quite motionless, enthralled by

the group of stage faces which in some indefinable manner differed from those of other people. Each wore an expression of pathos, mockery, of sad resignation or haughty sorrow, and so strongly were these expressions imprinted and retained, that the countenance itself had come to resemble a mask.

But the song came to an end, and suddenly an excited liveliness appeared among the group which had been listening so motionlessly. Hands gesticulated rapidly, sonorous voices drowned one another, and at the same time the pain, pathos, mockery or disdain seemed to vanish from the faces as though it had been washed off. All at once they had become stupid, commonplace or uninteresting, and from a minstrel of deep, tender insight, the singer was transformed into a vain youth greedily absorbing each word of praise and flattery that he could catch.

I made a movement. The door creaked, and Jenny turned round at once with a little cry of dismay. A moment later the last of the spell was broken, and I was standing in the midst of several showily-clad young women with loud voices and powdered faces, and of young men with Schiller collars, long locks and light suits, while Jenny introduced them, mentioning names in the colourlessly correct manner she had learnt from her mother; while her group of friends, no longer enthralling or remarkable, were self-consciously giggling or vainly seeking an attitude of ease.

At my pressing invitation the circle re-formed itself, and I sat on a chair in the centre of it, absurdly elevated, as though on a throne. My valuable Rosenthal tea

set and some torn cartons, out of which sweets and chocolates had rolled, were on the floor.

But the former atmosphere remained absent, an oppressive silence prevailed, and, animated by the desire to be jovial and, above all, not "stuck up," I tried to engage the shiny-headed, bare-throated young man seated at my feet in a conversation about the play now in rehearsal. As he shortly expressed it, however, he was "not on in this show," and therefore was not in the least interested in it. "It's rotten," he said bluntly with an unmistakable "Amsterdam" accent, and Jenny, who had apparently observed me to frown at the use of that unparliamentary word, hastened to explain that "rotten" was a most ordinary stage expression, and was always used when a play was not up to much. At that, the mandoline player looked up at me, and I was again struck by the classical beauty of his broad, strongly-outlined head, even though the low forehead and eyes set far apart, were by no means signs of intelligence.

"Middle-class theatre-craft," he said in a voice like a bronze bell. "A doomed-to-death realism, vainly attempting to blow life into a conventional play written merely to amuse."

Agreeably surprised, I bent down towards him. Nothing seemed to me of greater interest than to hear some of the ideals and desires of this youth who was one of those destined to help to form the stage of the future, so I followed up his words with animation. "Still, you must not underestimate realism, for it was the great power which did so much to vanquish the worn-out technique of rant and declamation."

The brilliant golden-brown eyes gazed at me somewhat suspiciously. Then his face became a fine mask of scornful rejection as, with an expressive gesture, he repeated the words "realism," "convention" as though in deadly abhorrence.

"Even Reinhardt has attained to his present method of managerial simplicity by way of pure realism," I continued, still full of animation. "Only compare his first Shakespearian settings with the 'Penthislea' the 'Carlos,' the Maeterlinck productions of his later period."

The young man again repeated almost menacingly. "Middle-class theatre-craft. Realism is doomed," and with a chilly feeling, I heard myself like a wound-up automaton still continuing to talk about expression and managerial idealism, while the conviction slowly dawned upon me that he knew nothing but that one sentence which he had probably read somewhere and learned by heart. His face, still raised to mine, reflected great attention, but all at once, while I was in the midst of my enthusiastic discourse, he turned to the girl next to him and said: "You're forgetting Landheer. She was his mistress for about six months." And then I realized that he was not listening to me, but to the others. And now I could hear what they were all talking about, their heads close together, with the greedy intense interest in the affairs of other people which had so annoyed me of late in Jenny.

Lena Terburg and her seemingly endless train of lovers were passed in review, until not a shred of her reputation was left.

Forgotten were the languishing or coquettishly

attractive attitudes. Heads were bent towards one another, hands gesticulated, voices crossed one another with incredible rapidity.

Gossip, that curse of the stage, the parasite undermining it ! There was not one that did not join in the chorus, although who knows how many of these young men had not enjoyed the favours of Lena Terburg, while who can say how many of these girls were not in the habit of adoring and flattering her to her face ?

And yet I soon forgot my indignation—and laughed. Inimitably funny was little Max Loots' mockery of Manders the lady-killer, who after many years of a liaison with Lena Terburg, whom he sometimes hated, yet could not bear any of the younger ones to pay her any attention. And how divertingly, yet with what venom, was Manders' paternal scolding imitated by a young and noisy child, who had been caught by the great man at a kissing-party between the wings !

Wonderful world of intrigue and love, comradeship and scandal ! Wonderful people with their unconventional, cynical but acute outlook upon human relationships, combined with the romantic idealism of love with which they every now and then put the outsider off the scent again. And what of Jenny Heysten who was living all this greedily and intensely, Jenny, as susceptible to impressions and influences as a sensitive plant to the light, Jenny listening with burning cheeks and blinking eyes like a child to a forbidden tale ? Suddenly the words buzzed in my worried brain : “ Do you really believe that a woman, a young girl can live in such an atmosphere without being contaminated by it ? ”

I stood up and made some excuse about pressing work, murmured something about an early dinner, so that my guests rose from their negligent or artistically attractive poses, and with much noisy merriment prepared to take their departure. There was much active business with powder puffs, and I stood looking on in amazement as more than one of these young girls touched up lips and eyebrows without a shadow of shame. Hats were donned with careful attention, little curls twisted and pulled out effectively, scarves and furs arranged to their best advantage, and there was not a single one, boy or girl, who did not stop in front of the glass on the landing to gaze at him or herself, both full-face and profile, before turning to me, the audience for whom attitudes and expressions must be studied, with an affected self-assured little smile. Then I felt one pair of eyes fixed upon me full of mocking comprehension, those of Max Loots. He was the last to stretch out his hand in leave-taking. Upon the stairs could be heard the tinkling of the mandoline, the buzz of voices both high and deep in exceedingly frivolous discourse, no doubt to the annoyance of Mrs. Verspies.

"You have had lessons with Veraart, haven't you?" he asked, "I remember your name; I, too, was a pupil of his."

"And is the Little Theatre as Veraart taught you the stage ought to be?" I asked thinking of the experiences of the afternoon.

I again read mockery and comprehension upon the boy's intelligent face as his eyes began to glow.

"He will come back," he said with conviction.

“ He won’t be able to stick it over there, and in the meantime we must seek our salvation elsewhere—that is, all of us who are waiting. You don’t know how many there are, many more than you imagine perhaps, who are waiting for him.’

CHAPTER V

JENNY came rushing into my room in a state of extreme excitement.

“ I’ve got a ripping part. Mien van Dam is ill, and it’s impossible for her to be well enough to act by the first night, so Mr. Manders said I might have a try at it.”

“ O, my dear,” I exclaimed, surprised and delighted. “ How lovely for you ! ” I turned over the leaves of the MS. she held out to me.

“ Nearly twenty pages, an entrance in the first and second act, a little scene of which quite a lot can be made, and a topping little scene in the third.”

It may have been the too triumphant sound in her voice, which suddenly made me remark : “ But why are you chosen for it ? It seems to me there must be others with a greater right, who have been in the company much longer, and have more knowledge of routine than you ? ”

I gazed at her steadily as I spoke, and noticed how a faint blush arose in her cheeks and spread to her neck. When Jenny blushed her face always wore a guilty expression. But after a long pause, she answered indifferently : “ Oh, I suppose Manders thought I was just suited for it. I believe he knows there is something in me.” I thought of Nico, his contemptuous

opinion of Manders, his sneering taunt, "What does a woman like you——" and, trying once more to overcome the repulsion which always made me uncertain in touching upon such matters, I said: "You're quite sure, dear, that you're always very careful and reserved? I'm afraid one cannot always trust the motives of a man like Manders."

Jenny laughed loudly and drew my head to hers with rough tenderness.

"Oh, you dear old Maggie!" she cried. "If only you knew how priceless you are when you look self-conscious like that. Besides having a real and a divorced wife, Mr. Manders has a liaison with Nans Verver, you know, that quaint kid with the bobbed hair who comes here so often, and then there's Lena Terburg who is so jealous that she intercepts with argus eyes every glance cast upon his beautiful, manly countenance." These facts, however divertingly dished up, were scarcely calculated to set my mind at ease. "He has promised," continued Jenny, "that as soon as he has a free evening, I may come to his house to rehearse my part with him, and Dirk Peper says he only does that with those of whom he really expects something."

I swallowed my misgivings. After all, was I not a stiff old maid? Ought I not to rejoice in the good luck which had fallen to Jenny, and did not Nico's letter lie faithfully every Monday morning next to her plate on the breakfast table? All said and done, she was engaged, and of course those people over there knew about it.

"It's such a dream of a part," said Jenny in thought-

ful ecstasy. "When Mien van Dam was rehearsing it, I always felt that a great deal more could be made of it and imagined how I should do it myself. It's just an ordinary girl of the streets who falls in love with a man who has once been kind to her, while Georgette—that is Lena Terburg, who of course plays the courtesan—has enslaved him and has him in her power. In the third act the two women meet in Gaston's rooms during his absence, and little Nini blurts out all she thinks of Georgette's egotism and ambition."

Jenny sprang up and began to act the part in which with her wonderful memory she was almost word-perfect, and I could already hear in her voice the golden warmth, with an occasional painful sound in it, which invested the sentimental, conventional words with something exceedingly touching. At the end I laughed and told myself I was a fool to worry.

The next few days were entirely occupied with everything in connection with the part, which exacted a new costume, hat and boa for the important little scene in the third act. I remained incurably deaf to the seductive word "Hirsch," and decided that the more modest, but in my opinion quite smart enough shop in the Leidsche Straat, where last year, with unusual extravagance, I had treated myself to a very pretty fashionable frock, would meet the occasion.

"Whatever else it is, it must be showy," explained Jenny with cool self-confidence to the attendant in the show room, "because I have to play a 'tarty' part in it." And I felt myself blush to the roots of my hair as the manager overhearing the offending word

gave her an impudent look and smile. And I had again to struggle against anger and annoyance when a moment later the daughter of the Heystens stood before me in an eccentric combination of blue and green shot taffetas, a narrow skirt up to her knees, a bodice without sleeves, and a *décolletage* which she much increased by turning in some of the bodice. Jenny tripped from one glass to the other in absorbed attention while the manager, evidently interested, came up with a huge hat to match the frock, a new model, meant to be worn a little tilted to one side and very low over the forehead.

"Unique—quite unique, don't you think so?" said the fitter with satisfaction, looking at me for approval.

But I was observing the look of which Jenny from under half-closed eyes was trying the effect on the manager, who, his head bent forward, was smiling with good-natured politeness, but at the same time gazing at her with gross familiarity. I noticed how she turned round with a swing of her hips as she again sought his regard in the mirror. And her face under this exotic finery had become the face of a stranger. It wore an expression of coarse coquetry which made me shiver until suddenly throwing herself down beside me on the gilded sofa holding the hat upon her raised hand, she asked me with childish meekness: "Wouldn't it make it too expensive, Miss Margaret? Hadn't we better perhaps go somewhere else to look at hats? There are lots of sales on." And, relieved, I once more understood that she had been acting just now, for herself, for me, and for that strange man, that the

actress has the gift of being able "to creep into another skin," to become for an hour or so entirely and absolutely another person.

But two days before the first night, as I was bending over my desk at the library absorbed in deciphering an extraordinary handwriting, I suddenly found Jenny at this unusual hour of the afternoon standing before me deathly pale, her eyes full of rage.

"Come with me," she cried authoritively, "I have something to tell you. You must come, Greet." I observed the curiosity of some of my colleagues; Jenny, too, was aware of it, and in spite of her evident agitation, managed to control herself. I stood up hastily, and followed her into the hall. "They've cut it," she whispered almost choking with anger. "They've cut out the whole of my lovely scene in the third act except for one or two silly sentences. They pretend it's because it's too long and must be cut, but I know better. I've felt it threatening for days when I was rehearsing it with Lena Terburg. I felt she couldn't bear me to have to say all those fine things, to have to arouse sympathy at her expense, and so she simply forced Manders to cut it."

This seemed perfectly absurd to me, mere gossip, incited perhaps by some of her fellow-artists. For had not Lena been particularly kind to Jenny?

"But, my dear child," I was beginning tactfully when she angrily interrupted me.

"Of course you don't believe it. Do you think I should have believed it myself if they had said it of anyone else? But Nell and Kitty van Doorn, and heaps of others, know by experience that Lena Terburg

always does it when she is afraid of rivalry. Max Loots says I may consider it an honour, that she only does it when she scents talent, and that she didn't try to do Mien van Dam out of a single word."

Her voice had risen, and its fierce hoarseness was echoing against the high walls of the deserted hall. I had already noticed a head moving restlessly in front of the glass door at the end of it. Desperately, I snatched my coat from its peg. "I'll go with you. We'll try to get hold of Manders himself, or ask Mr. Bierman to talk to him."

She pressed my arm close to hers. "You're a dear, Greet, but that would really be landing me into a hornets' nest. None of them dare to say anything to her, because she's the 'leading lady,' and the only really good one in the whole company. Manders and Lena Terburg are the only two that draw, and they would jolly well have to close down if she were to chuck it. Everything always happens as she wants it. Do you imagine she would ever consent to act a part, even in the greatest masterpiece, unless she could appear pretty and young in it? And even then, do you suppose she plays it as it is written? I can tell you something about that. In this play, Max in his small part as secretary, ought to say: 'She's a pretty woman, but not in her first youth.' Do you suppose he's allowed to say that? She's jolly well made him cut it. And in my part I have to reproach her with never having felt anything, never having known what it means to make a sacrifice for the man one loves. She can't stand that. It makes her appear unsympathetic, and a star like Lena Terburg refuses to be

anything but sweet and lovely in the eyes of the audience. Oh, Greet, it's all so different from what it seems, so utterly different from what we imagined. She, Manders, and a heap of others don't care a hang about the play they happen to be acting in. Their only interest is to know whether they will appear sympathetic. That's why they strengthen the MS. if they think it necessary, and act the parts quite differently from how the author intended them to be acted, simply adding or cutting out just as suits their purpose."

I was convinced that Jenny exaggerated. Of course her fellow-artists, the beginners, phoenixes in their own estimation, had consoled themselves for their own disappointments by slander and abuse of the successful ones.

"Oh, but that's impossible," I protested incredulously, "if they were to upset the equilibrium of a play like that they would throw the whole thing out of joint."

"Oh, is it though, you'll soon see if it is!" she cried scornfully. "You ought to hear them talking about it. What does a French or German playwright know about it if they do throw a whole act out of gear, cut part of the last act, or leave out some of the characters because otherwise it makes the setting come too expensive? Max Loots says that's why Manders is so down on national plays, says the Dutch dramatists don't understand their craft because they insist upon being present at a rehearsal to watch his manceuvres."

"And they have cut out your little scene wholesale?"

“All my answers have been cut except for the opening sentences. I’ve nothing to say but ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ And so the whole part of Nini has been mutilated and nothing is left of her but a rough, coarse girl of the streets, a fine contrast of course to the polished courtesan—represented by Lena Terburg.”

“We might have spared ourselves that expensive extra frock,” said I.

For the first time, Jenny’s eyes filled with tears as she bit her trembling lip. “But I’ll be even with her,” she promised herself passionately. “The false wretch, to be so sweet to me at first——”

“Don’t be petty, Jen,” I advised her. “Keep out of quarrels. Hold yourself aloof. That’s the only way to show yourself her superior.”

“There are only two ways on the stage,” continued Jenny ignoring my words. “To tread on, or be trodden upon. And I made up my mind long ago, Greet, that I won’t be trodden upon.”

At the Little Theatre, the Bierman and Manders company relied upon ancient fame. Manders, considered in Amsterdam the wittiest man upon the boards, had captured the affections of the general public with his infectious laugh and instinct for what the public demanded, and Lena Terburg, who had been its idol in those fortunate days when spirituality had been an unknown quality, was still playing one youthful part after another although, according to little Max Loots, the only thing real still left of her was her falseness. Suggestion is the art of the actor, and Manders and Lena had played leading parts long

enough to have become proficient in maintaining illusions of spirit and youth. But during the last few years disturbing symptoms of spirituality and exaltation had appeared upon the dramatic horizon, and the tide threatened to turn. It was worse for the woman. The most seductive frocks and hats were powerless to prevent the critics from descending from enthusiastic homage to courteous respect, and from that courtesy to no more than a sour recognition of her still inimitable technique. She hated with a hate only to be found upon the stage a journalist who had dared to express the opinion that there were many fine maternal parts suited to her, and that it was high time for her to leave *ingénues* and lucky *cocottes* to the younger generation. The year before Jenny had entered the company, it had already become for her a struggle for life or death. The Little Theatre became notorious for its ugly actresses; rivalry leered out from every fresh young face, from every beginner's little triumph, so that the steadily diminishing company now consisted of little beyond the two stars, a few superannuated artists, and some quite untutored novices, utterly inexperienced and therefore harmless.

The war misery had rendered still more uncertain the already insecure foundations of the company, and the young actors and actresses, who nevertheless were expected to be clad anew with French smartness in each succeeding play, were put upon half salaries. The renovation of settings and properties had to be postponed to await better times, and Manders and Lena continued to act their love scenes upon the same sofa with its torn satin and broken springs, to write

their love letters at the bureau with its rickety foot, while the *recherché* supper preceding their great scene consisted of wooden chicken, and some unknown frothing, yellow liquor poured out of a dusty champagne bottle.

Nevertheless, on the night when Jenny Heysten, or according to her name on the programme, Stella Rovano, was about to act her first part of any importance, and I, pale with nervousness, took my seat in the small crowded theatre, the faded red velvet and dim gilt created an illusion of comfort and luxury. The moth-riddled curtain hung in majestic folds, and when it was rung up, the much reviled drawing-room took on an appearance of allurements and chic in the brilliant glow of lime and footlights. And when Lena Terburg, in a cobwebby lace frock and a large hat covered with flowers, made her first entrance, elegant and with all the calm self-assurance of years of routine, I, as well as the enthralled audience, received an illusion of grace and youth.

After all, what a great actress this woman, who might have been a grandmother, really was; how charming were the rapid gestures of her little hands, how magical still the voice, how infectious her laugh, the once famous laugh, around which an adoring poet had woven an undying sonnet. Surely it was not possible that this woman with her charm and sweetness, could be so petty, so treacherous, jealous and calculating as Jenny supposed. But as the play proceeded, a painful realism leered from behind the artistic make-up and clothes. The no longer youthful form must have been encased in a veritable harness of steel and whalebone,

over which, as upon the wooden body of a lay figure, was draped the costly lace of the smart frock. The lower part of the face with its too-heavy chin, was partly hidden by a wide tulle ruche, and a large auburn wig curled low over forehead and ears. What agony such visibly too-narrow, high-heeled shoes must be causing! What thick layers of powder there were upon the face which sometimes in a moment of unfavourable light exhibited its already coarse folds; and what an exacting study to learn to stand, move or sit, so that the tell-tale side aspect was never seen by the audience.

I was seized with a sad repulsion. Suddenly it seemed to me that everything behind the footlights was cankered and rotten with envy and hate, born of the fierce struggle against wrinkles and ugliness, of old against young, of those standing on the top of the shaky ladder of success against those trying with difficulty to climb it.

Absorbed in these reflections I had lost the thread of the play, and was only recalled to my surroundings when a man-servant made his entrance and announced "Nini Grasset." My heart almost ceased to beat; my hands were icy cold with agitation. It was Jenny's entrance. It was as though I could feel her suspense trembling in my own body as I saw her, wonderfully small, an utterly new being standing in the brightly lighted aperture. If there were townspeople or acquaintances of hers in front, they would certainly not recognize her. Under the large hat overshadowing her eyes her face had been made up very white, with strongly-marked scarlet lips. Her hair was frizzed

out over her ears, and the blue and green silk with its chameleon-like changes, had been widely turned back to show her gleaming white throat and chest. There was no sign of nervousness in the utterance of her first words, spoken in a broad accent, nothing of the wooden uncertainty of the beginner; and when she sat down, throwing herself with careless ease into a big chair, her legs, visible to the knees, audaciously outstretched, a momentary laugh rippled through the house. I could feel the effect of her unexpected success as she settled herself deeper among the cushions, her nose in the air, and began her short dialogue with Manders, a girl of the streets in a silk frock, not at all self-conscious, wonderfully self-possessed. When she got up, sat on the arm of Manders' chair, then on his knee, gazed at him, laughed at him, her manner was so sensual that I felt a hot shame blurring my vision. A few moments, and the scene was over. It was a typical play of the boulevards containing some superficial sentiment, a drawing-room dialogue and some scabrous situations, a play in which pleasure was represented as deception, deception as an heroic action, love the more delightful when it proceeded from lust, a play in which to the delight of the thrilled and amused audience, Jenny Heysten, who had become an actress through vocation and love of art, played the part of a girl of the streets.

In the second act, the scene of which was laid at an hotel, Jenny came on with several others. She had nothing of importance to say, only one or two lines to repeat which had just been uttered a moment before by Lena Terburg, but she reproduced, perhaps half

unconsciously, the voice of the diva so accurately that a murmur of appreciation could be distinctly heard in the house, and then instinctively she made use of the opportunity. Bending her head sideways, her body took on the attitude of one laced into a tight corset trying to be prepossessing, and she even imitated the gesture of a hand trying to relieve the pressure of a tight collar band. So unmistakable was the likeness, so readily was it absorbed by the surprised audience, that Manders, to whom she was also supposed to utter the words as a reproach, had some difficulty in suppressing a laugh. All the attention of the audience was suddenly concentrated upon Jenny, the unknown beginner who was distinguishing herself at the expense of the leading lady.

But in the third act, when she finally stood opposite Lena Terburg in the scene which at the command of the diva had become unrecognizable, the latter had her revenge. Lena's sentences sped like arrow-darts, and she hurried the dialogue in a way that made it impossible for Jenny to complete her lines. At the end, the latter stood like a beaten hound before the other's sneering self-assurance, and at her exit, Lena shouted yet another contemptuous "creature," not in the manuscript, after her.

The play was over. Among the row of bowing artists next to Lena Terburg, who displayed two large bouquets while various pots and baskets lay scattered on the stage around her, stood Jenny, holding the modest sheaf of chrysanthemums which, after some hesitation as to whether it would be correct, I had ordered for her. The honoured actress bowed and

nodded in recognition of the unstinted applause, her grateful, delighted glances sweeping the boxes and balconies where her friends and admirers were sitting. Then she put down her flowers, and seized the hands of those standing next to her, of Manders on one side, of Jenny on the other. And thus they remained hand in hand as though symbolizing their comradeship, while the audience, standing too, bestowed upon them its enthusiastic homage . . .

At the back of the theatre with its steep steps and narrow door, over which a dismal gas jet flickered, I paced up and down, waiting for Jenny. In the deserted alley, the high, weather-beaten façade with its dimly lit barred windows seemed like the wall of a prison. In the distance sounded the busy hum of the street, the rumbling of the last motor cars, taxis and carriages over which the arc lamps were shedding their glare. But here all was silent and deserted. Nearly all the poor dwellings opposite were shrouded in darkness. From one could be heard the fretful wailing of a child. My mood became as sombre as the region surrounding it. Stage life : the glowing, brilliantly-lighted front—the back poverty-stricken and dark ! I tried to feel glad at Jenny's undeniable success. Had I expected her to play Desdemona or Juliet already ? What did the kind of play matter as long as she interpreted it with so much talent ?

A door slammed in the black silent building, a heavy door, and quick footsteps approached over the cobbles. The little street-door grated on its hinges, a spring bounced in its lock as though eager to thrust out those leaving by it. Upon the high step under the wavering gas-

flame stood two persons, a young man in a tan mackintosh and a girl in a cheap showy coat. I recognized them as having played a marquis and marquise in the play. "Well—so long!" he cried, hurrying out before her on the cobbles. She caught him by the sleeve, whispering something, and he gave her a rough indifferent laugh as she clung to his arm, almost running to keep up with his long strides out of the alley towards the glow of the street lamps. Again there was silence, my footsteps alone sounding upon the uneven cobbles; then a couple of girls came out, giggling like flappers and painted and dressed like prostitutes. After them two men, one of whom was complaining of some injustice he had suffered. Then came Lena Terburg, alone, enveloped closely in a costly fur coat, some hastily arranged flowers in her arms. Above her pulled-up collar, her burning eyes glowed in a face tired and flabby after the strain of the evening. For one moment she stood as though awaiting someone who should come to meet her out of the darkness, then she caught sight of me, and her eyes scanned my face in cold hostility as she coughed and passed by. What was it that made all this so unutterably depressing? Was it the contrast between the light and applause, a house full of happy, good-humoured people, the stimulating delight of glory and success, and this dreary exit through a paintless door in a dark passage that suggested the stealthy departure from a house of ill-fame? Why was Jenny so long in coming? What was keeping her in that big dark building which now appeared to be deserted, where behind the barred windows high up in front one by one the lights went

out? At last I could hear her voice. Quick steps approached, and her nervous little laugh mingled with the deep distinct one of a man. The door swung open, closed again, and there they stood together under the flickering light—Jenny and Manders. He wore a fur-trimmed coat, a wide-brimmed, soft felt hat over his eyes, and looked very different from the pedantic mummer who had been introduced to me at the students' performance. Even here he seemed to identify himself with the charming lover he had acted to-night, and it seemed as though I, standing against the dark façade, were able to feel with Jenny's senses that, as he was now, he had power.

He grasped her by the elbow to slacken her quick steps, turned her towards him, and with half-closed eyes peered into hers. "Damn it," he cried, "you've pith in you. You're a sport, a cheeky little kid, that's what you are! But she'll do you one in the eye, the great Lena. Bet you what you like, she'll complain about you to Bierman!"

Jenny released her arm from his clutch. She lifted the flowers she was carrying to her face, and gazing coquettishly at him above them, asked slowly: "And suppose Bierman sends for me, will Mr. Manders agree with him and the great Lena?"

It was too dark to see whether Manders blushed. He stretched out his hand, pushed the flowers aside so that Jenny's face was free, and raised her chin. "I can at all events assure the manager of your talent," he said deliberately, and then, still closer, with his face almost touching hers, he asked, "Was that sweetheart of yours in front to-night?"

"He never can come. He's in a fortress on the frontier."

"Dear me! What a shame!" There was a sound of mock pity in the deep voice as the big hand hovered above her face. "Such a sweet little thing to be always alone——"

I stepped forward hastily out of the shadow into the circle of light cast by the lantern, and becoming aware of my presence, Jenny sprang from the steps with exaggerated alacrity. "Oh, Maggie, I've been waiting for you ever so long." The actor lifted his hat with a courtly gesture, and relapsed into his attitude of fatherly instructor.

"Ah—Miss—er—if I'm not mistaken, I've met you before."

"Mr. Manders—Miss Schepp," introduced Jenny correctly. "The lady with whom I am living."

Manders bowed like an hidalgo. "How did you think our first night went off?" he inquired, his vacant gaze roaming over me towards the lighted street in the distance as he took a cigarette from a silver case.

I considered myself as sufficiently one of the "profession" to know what was expected of me, and subduing my aversion, answered tactfully: "It's a part which might have been created for you."

We were walking out of the alley together, Manders in the middle, and he made a gesture as of waving something away from him with the hand holding the cigarette.

"There it is again," he exclaimed with superior resignation, "the usual opinion of the man in the

street that I shall read in the newspapers to-morrow. 'An easy triumph, as though it were written for him.' It's because you playgoers don't understand how difficult it is to create a part, how I have to fake it all up, my dear lady, how even the smallest comic effect exacts hours of study"; he pushed back his soft hat and smoothing his forehead with a theatrical gesture. "Ah, believe me, my dear ladies, that's the miserable part of our profession. When a man like me, is endowed with the unfortunate faculty of being able to act with absolute naturalness, standing above technique as I do, the foolish playgoer imagines that it's quite simple, that every part I play is, as it were, purposely written to fit me."

I received this reprimand in silence and with suitable humility, feeling myself by no means competent to add to this lofty strain of self-praise. "Little Loots was very good in his small part of the secretary," I said at last, thinking to find some neutral ground.

But the hand with the cigarette again waved away my remark indignantly. "Ah, yes, I might have known. My dear lady, believe me, in that part success lies much too deep for an ordinary actor. Do you really imagine that that boy, that conceited young ass, made a tenth part of what he ought to have done with it? Had I played it, you would have seen something different; in fact, I'm the only actor in this country able to do justice to a part like that, but, well—it's my fate I suppose only to play lead."

"*Wo du nicht bist*," I quoted, but by this time we had come to the street, and a taxi-driver looking for a fare drew up at the curb. I noticed that the classic

quotation had been lost upon him, because he continued indignantly: "It's impossible for me to do everything at the same time," and I felt Jenny's warning fingers at my back, and bit my lip to restrain a laugh.

Our leave-taking was truly majestic, Jenny receiving a paternal pat on the shoulder: "Work—study your enunciation, little girl—you don't know how to enunciate, you young grasshoppers. You don't accentuate your vowels. Good night, Miss Heysten. Good night, Miss—er, Schepp. Hope to have the pleasure some other time."

"What a worm," I burst out as the taxi glided away, and with Jenny's arm through mine, walked homewards. "And you allow a creature like that to make love to you! You allow him in a so-called fatherly way to——"

She glanced at me sideways, her under lip pouting disdainfully. "He has the power," she said at last slowly. "If he's up against you, you might as well roll yourself up, but if he cares to help you——"

I shook her arm. "Surely you don't expect to make me believe that's any reason to let him dare to utter impertinences, to stroke your face?"

She freed herself, and I could feel her obstinacy as she walked sullenly at my side. I began to plead with her. "Jenny, think of Nico for a moment. If he were to——" She stamped with her foot on the pavement.

"That's nothing to do with it," she cried angrily, her voice hoarse with tears. "You don't understand anything about it. When one knows nothing of the

stage, has never seen actors and actresses together, one thinks it odd if they put their arms round one another's necks, hold hands and sit on one another's knees. But if you would only use your brains! It is merely the profession in which people are so continually in contact with each other that it all becomes usual and no one ever stops doing it, or thinks it in any way horrid or improper. I was frightened that Manders would be furious because I imitated Lena Terburg, but luckily he couldn't help laughing. They all laughed; it was quite a little rag, and Max Loots made up a parody about it. Of course Lena Terburg will complain about me to Bierman to-morrow, and I should get the bird if Manders were against me too."

That night I lay long awake. The responsibility I had assumed so light-heartedly began to weigh upon me unbearably. When the run of the piece was over, I could easily withdraw the child, who had no definite contract, from this unprincipled *milieu*, this theatre which seemed to be no better than a—an ugly word came into my mind. But would it be any better elsewhere? The choice of plays perhaps; but what of the spirit? Would the danger be less anywhere else?

I don't remember the tangled dreams that tortured me that night, giving me a feeling of imminent danger, but I awoke in a fright to see a vague grey gleam through the linen blind, and to hear the stairs creak under stealthy descending footsteps. I sat up quickly, a series of absurd possibilities in my brain as I saw through the half-open door of my room Jenny gliding downstairs in her nightgown. What did it mean?

Noiselessly I sprang out of bed and leant over the banisters from whence I could see that she had left the staircase, and was now standing in the empty shop ; now she was coming back again. She made a brusque gesture of fear when she discovered me, but I laughed, a leaden burden dropping from me. I could see that she had the morning paper in her hand. Awake early from suspense, she had lain listening for the rattle of the newspaper in the letter-box.

I hastily drew aside a curtain in my sitting-room, and in the uncertain daylight our two heads bent in breathless expectation over the unfolded sheet, our eyes greedily scanning its columns. " Here," pointed Jenny's finger. " Here it is."

. . . " A first night at the Little Theatre—an entertaining farce—witty dialogue—not suitable for our daughters, it is true. What would such a play be without the comic gifts of our great Manders, without the charm and grace of the ever-youthful Lena Terburg, who in a series of wonderful frocks——" I skipped this hymn of praise. At the bottom of the column, the last lines, " Of the minor characters there is little to say. We have become accustomed by degrees to find these filled by novices at the Little Theatre, Max Loots, in his delicate and refined acting as the secretary, being the only exception worthy of mention."

We stood gazing at one another, and as the rustling paper fell from our hands I realized for the first time how firmly I had expected Jenny to be distinguished in her fairly important part by some words of praise. We felt ashamed of our greedy curiosity, and I was

acutely conscious of my appearance in my night-gown, a thin grey plait hanging from either side of my head, I, who with a vanity I refused to acknowledge, never appeared before my pupil before my toilet was quite completed.

"There was another paper in the box," said Jenny in a small voice, "the one belonging to Mrs. Verspices. I could fetch it a moment, and put it back again directly."

In suspense we again searched the columns, where we found this notice. "The Little Theatre has once more provided us with a dish according to the customary Parisian recipe; but this time with an extra piquant sauce. Lena Terburg gambols through three moderately empty acts like a young filly, exchanges a white lace creation for a negligée of rose crêpe de chine, and afterwards a tailor-made royal blue velours de chasse for a robe chemise of champagne voile-ninon." Superficially and impatiently, I scanned these minute fashion details, and felt a momentary sarcastic pleasure in the sentence—"It was as though Dirk Manders had been measured for the part of the Count de Tournelles, so well did it fit him——" but underneath I caught sight of Jenny's name. "Of the minor characters, one is worthy of especial mention. The midinette Nini Grasset was played by a certain Miss Stella Rovano, which a persistent rumour declares to be a pseudonym disguising the true name of a lady of aristocratic descent who fled from her ancestral home to devote herself to the art of Melpomene. It was decidedly extraordinary to see how this young girl of a patrician family, who has never before played a

part of any importance and thus can scarcely be an adept at stage routine, was yet able to portray a cocotte with such natural ease in a dialect full of characteristic and even perverse details. Certainly very promising."

I did not dare look up, and I let fall the edge of the paper because I was trembling so. And then I heard Jenny's voice like that of a child in grievous distress whisper haltingly: "Greet—Greet—They'll read that at home—it's our paper! Surely they'll understand? Her hand gripped my arm. "Perhaps Nico will read it too, and as it's written there, the way it's described, the words they use—Good God! How horrible it is! You know I had to play it like that. At each rehearsal, Manders hammered it into me: 'You are frightened,' he said. 'You stand there just like a young lady.' Oh, dear; why should it be just that paper? Why can't he simply say that he thought it bad? What have I ever done to him, to that man who wrote it, what grudge has he against me? And the other papers—think how many there are! Who knows if they have not written worse things about me?"

"Of course not, Jen," seeking some words of consolation. "You must not exaggerate and upset yourself like that. Every artist is open to unfavourable criticism, and I bet most of your fellow-artists either shrug their shoulders or are able to laugh at it!"

"They pretend to laugh," cried Jenny fiercely, "but I've noticed that in their hearts they're very frightened of it. And now I can understand the hatred of most of them for the newspapers. If only I knew who it is who wrote that—if I only had him

here now ! ” and with clenched hands, the pupils of her eyes contracted into an unnatural, black depth, she panted : “ Do you remember that book of Leonard Frank, ‘ Maggie,’ the hatred of that helpless schoolboy for the master who humiliates him. I can understand it now, the feeling of that boy, and his joy, the blessed sensation of being at last able to wreak his revenge when years afterwards he has his tormentor at his mercy.”

Theatrical gestures—a passionate, pathetic voice—my common sense tried to condemn it all as “ acting.” But did not my heart respond to hatred towards the unknown with power over the words which were his tools and playthings, hatred of that grey-black paper which had suddenly become a thing of poison.

I had forgotten how I, too, had been astonished and upset at Jenny’s impudent portrayal of Nini Grasset, forgotten also how much the world of the stage into which I had just penetrated had during the last few weeks become repulsive to me. I threw my arms around the frail, shivering girlish body in its thin nightgown seeking shelter against mine, and only remembering how bitter was her grief, I tried to comfort her, as one does a child, with angry words against the unknown that has caused it pain.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER papers gave favourable notices of Jenny's debût, several praising her talent ; one, unfortunately not a leader, even mentioning her gifts as extraordinary. In spite of this, however, from the time of her first bitter experience she always hated the press, especially after her fellow-artists had contributed the information that the writer of the offending article was a particular friend of Lena Terburg. Then, with her customary lack of logic, she drew conclusions of which she remained convinced ever afterwards, even during the period when she was praised and fêted as are few.

" You read it first, Greet," was generally her nervous request the morning following a first night, and even when I told her it was good, or at all events " not bad," hours would sometimes elapse before she found courage to read it herself. And although she used to boast, as did most of her comrades, of never reading press notices or of being perfectly indifferent to them, I knew very well that for days together she would be depressed by one prejudiced or mocking sentence.

" A bad notice is like a burn," she said once. " It hurts frightfully for a time, then it gets better and you forget all about it ; but long after it has healed you feel as though the place still smarts."

In spite of her ambition and obstinate determination to succeed, Jenny never had much self-confidence, and this was why in her heart she really believed every bad criticism to be true and to fancy that the good ones were biased, or only written to excite envy in the minds of other artists. "The Press!" Ah, for how many months was it not the integral part of our lives? Were we not ever conscious of it as a dark menacing shadow at the back of all our illusions and plans for a prosperous future?

After the first night Jenny had an interview with the manager. He had scolded her, she said, but added with an illuminating little laugh: "It wasn't very bad." He had made her promise to leave imitations severely alone in future; but from this time dated a fierce, irreconcilable hatred between her and the once adored leading lady.

But even without Lena's aid, Jenny's career at the Little Theatre seemed to prosper.

In the next play she was given the small but diverting part of a maid, and in the drama which broke the somewhat monotonous series of French comedies or German farces she had a fairly important rôle as ingénue; in course of time she was allowed to impersonate a minor character in nearly all the stock plays of the repertoire. It was encouraging, but it was very expensive. Just to "walk on" for two minutes in some aristocratic ballroom scene required an evening frock, a fan, a pair of brocaded shoes; as lady's maid returning from a long journey with the Marquise, Jenny had to wear an ample fur-trimmed cloak, and she certainly could not appear at the

countess' "at home" in her old blue coat and skirt. Then it would be a bag, out of which she had to take an important note, or a parasol with which she was to tap angrily upon the ground. And once a strained atmosphere hung over our rooms for two whole days when Jenny wanted a muff in which to put the handkerchief for drying her eyes, and I had insisted that her new morocco bag would answer the purpose equally well.

What was lacking in scenery and properties at the Little Theatre had to be concealed by the smart costumes of the actresses, and nobody enquired how those young girls came by the money for these expensive clothes. No one bothered to ask whether someone in a little back room three flights up, was suffering pangs of hunger as the price of a lace fichu or a coquetish toque, nor how often honour and chastity had been sold for the skunk muff or sealskin coat which were the envy of so many admiring and covetous eyes.

We had given up our expensive rooms over the fancy-goods shop, and in another, two flights up, had discovered a larger although more modest roof to shelter us. The new landlady had in my eyes too great a tolerance for the noisy young people who stormed up the staircase, the ragtimes with their doubtful, loudly-shouted choruses. Even after a month of the most persistent curiosity, she could not understand the relationship between her two boarders, the loose young lady and the stiff one, as in her liberal vocabulary she classified us.

Jenny wore bobbed hair and smoked cigarettes ;

Jenny who for years had walked about perfectly satisfied in a grey frock and shabby shoes, now developed a lasting interest in finery. Her attention wandered from the plays and her chances of success in them and concentrated upon Lena Terburg's frocks, how Nans Verver was going to dress her part, where Lilly van Veen had found the money to buy that ermine collar, whether Greta Hofland would risk another appearance in her rose *crêpe de chine*, etc.

That and the eternal gossip about one another's liaisons, disputes, jealousy and falseness, grew to seem the only source upon the stage, or at least upon that stage, from which the spongy roots drew their sap, the only objects from which these beings in their hard lives of make-believe and endless struggle for fame found pleasure; and as I sat listening to Jenny's highly-coloured anecdotes, I often remembered Nico, and how he had demolished with scorn all my arguments for what I had believed to be noble and exalted in this art.

Yet, returning from some difficult worrying study to find the room full of Jenny's friends, the powdered girls, the long-haired youths with occasionally an older one who had not yet won enough success to keep youth at a respectful distance, I was again fascinated by their "*joie de vivre*," their childish care-free pleasure, and I would throw off the morose mood, the many grievances which I had been hoarding up for many days against the lot. These young people were always free from stiffness or formality, and I had never discovered among them a trace of that self-importance or stuck-upness with which youthful society in

Holland is impregnated. They were, as Jenny had said, like a family of great careless children, one of them always buying a big bag of sweets out of his scanty means. There was always one to be comforted and soothed by discussion with the others, and I never entered the room without finding at least one couple in tender embrace, love and longing streaming from their kohl-encircled eyes.

After all, wasn't it far more natural than the stiff reserve of my own youth under which so much secret longing and desire had been stifled !

Nevertheless, when Jenny spent her few free evenings in studying a pile of fashion plates or was absorbed in the erotic novels by popular writers beloved at the Little Theatre, a chilly feeling of disappointment seized me, a distaste, sometimes almost a hatred for this careless superficial child, who drew upon my purse and good nature, who had gradually and stealthily come to rule over me, my home, my freedom, even my insight and convictions. For I was acutely conscious of the fact that many a time I subdued my insight, left my convictions unuttered to spare myself the mockery of Jenny's eyes, the almost compassionate little laugh upon her red lips, to anticipate and prevent her smothering hug with its disdainful, "Dear old Greet, you're a darling, but what in the name of all that's holy, do you know about these things ? "

But towards the end of that busy and disturbing winter I was confronted with a startling development.

A Dutch play with Lena Terburg and little Loots as its chief characters turned out an unexpected success. Manders was free ; it was a bad time of

year and until now the season had been very indifferent, so in defiance of custom some of the company were obliged to go on tour. Manders was to play his former successful part in *Mademoiselle Josette, ma Femme*, and Jenny was given the title-rôle. A star part, created earlier by Lena herself, full of delicate sensitive touches which, it is true, exacted more of technique than Jenny at present possessed, but which at all events offered her an opportunity of making a name for herself! I felt her to be aware of this, to be desirous of seizing this chance, from the way in which she studied her part every free hour, sometimes even far into the night and again in the morning before leaving for rehearsal.

I was already accustomed to the fact that where her parts were concerned, she seldom if ever asked my advice any longer, and I felt aggrieved when every now and then she would consult me about the everlasting problem of her clothes, absorbing all my leisure to help her with the fitting and selecting of them. She received an increase of salary, had a fixed contract until the end of the season, and felt herself so extraordinarily wealthy with her one hundred gulden a month, that I had great difficulty in restraining her from buying a marten stole and a gold fillet for her hair.

The first night took place in an out-of-the-way provincial town, and certainly no one among the scanty playgoers could possibly have imagined what a memorable evening it was for Stella Rovano, when at the harmonious conclusion of the play, after the elderly guardian has succeeded in winning the love of the

little Josette, a large basket of lilac and orchids was presented to her.

Who could be the donor of this extravagance? For one moment I rejoiced in the thought of Nico, who seemed to have adapted himself somewhat to the position lately with Jenny's artfully manœuvred press-cuttings, and who had even asked for her portrait in the new part, but it was almost impossible for him to have heard in time of a first night in this little out-of-the-way place.

Seated among this well-disposed audience, I had every opportunity of adding its opinion to my perhaps biased one. Had I at all doubted my own judgment, it was amply supported by those in front of and behind me. Jenny was exactly like Lena Terburg! Her laugh, the gesture with which she pushed back a lock of hair from her forehead, the sound of her voice—in a hundred little details, it was Lena Terburg, but young. Of the French girl with her traditional mingling of innocence and audacity, yet with enough charm to disarm the grimmest of psychologists, Jenny gave but an imitation, as during her school days she had imitated the rector, and old Adrian, but now with an acquired technique. After months upon the boards at the side of the great Lena in a number of small parts, she had adopted all her fluent superficially-charming traits and little mannerisms, though Jenny in no wise possessed the delightful little dimple with which the diva still endeavoured to fascinate. In this creation, there was nothing of the timid depth which had so moved me the night of "Marieke"; never once did I hear the true touching

accent which had made me feel that she had forgotten she was acting. Her voice even lacked its golden warmth, and had become high and shrill like that other voice.

But the audience laughed and applauded as Jenny with wonderful ease moved at the side of Manders, her delicate little figure looking sweet and childish next to his big majestic form, and the frocks from Hirsch, whose powerful spell I had this time not resisted, made her appear, at least to my inexperienced eyes, charming and elegant.

And paternally tender in his part of guardian and friend, was the glance the great man bestowed upon Jenny when, at the end of the play, he drew her arm through his and stood with her facing the footlights. I noticed how she looked up, full of admiring gratitude, at his rejuvenated face under its make-up and wig before selecting and handing him with a gracious gesture—the last remnant of imitation—a spray of lilac from her wealth of flowers.

When I entered the cold, ill-lighted waiting-room at the little station, a small group of actors was already sitting waiting, like frozen sparrows. Jenny, the only one to appear in the last scene with Manders, was to come on afterwards in a fly, and had begged me not to wait for her. A couple of the younger ones who knew me nodded, but I could immediately feel the almost hostile reserve which actors show towards the outsider trying to force an entrance into their charmed circle, and although I was anxious to hear the verdict upon Jenny's acting from her fellow-artists, I sat down at a little distance from them.

I noticed at once how they began to whisper quickly and vehemently in their corner ; one voice had a crying sound, while one repeatedly and ostentatiously blew his nose. Neither Jenny nor Manders had arrived when the train came in, and as the little troupe of mummers passed me to go on to the platform, I heard one of them say : " Now you come cosily in along with us, Nans, not with them, mind," and I saw Max Loots draw Nans Verver's fur closer about her throat with affectionate care and take her suitcase from her hand. And Nans, whom I had at once recognized by her long wooden back, allowed herself to be led like an invalid by the arm which he had thrust under hers as a support. But as she passed me with languid tottering footsteps, she suddenly turned her face towards mine, and from under her drawn-up collar threw me a glance so full of hatred and venomous spite that I felt as though an icy hand had touched me. I followed slowly, reserving a place for Jenny opposite mine in the empty compartment. With increasing anxiety, I leant out of the window.

Loots and the girl, who for months had belonged to the list of Jenny's friends, stood by the door of the next carriage. They also eagerly scanned the dimly-lighted and already empty platform. The guard was slamming the doors when at last, the impatient station-master beckoning to them, appeared Jenny and Manders at the top of the stairs. They were arm in arm as though the man were pushing the girl along. From his other arm swung the basket of flowers. I beckoned and waved, and felt convinced that Manders had seen me before he threw open the door of the last

carriage and hastily pushed Jenny inside. Perhaps there would scarcely have been time to reach my compartment; the train was already on the move. I fell back in my seat tortured by helpless anxiety, full of suspicion and doubt, vainly trying to recover my calm and unprejudiced insight. As on that evening months ago when, waiting in that alley behind the theatre, I had discovered Jenny with this same man, had observed the look in his eyes, his great hand hovering above her face, so now was I tormented by the same hopeless perception of being unable to cope with the situation, with uncertainty about my simple middle-class code as to what is permissible and what is forbidden, what a girl may allow, and what her self-respect and innate modesty ought instinctively to resent.

Half-an-hour afterwards, Jenny came in to me. As she was still standing before the door of the compartment, I could hear Max Loots who was leaning out of the window of his throw a joke at her which made the blood rush to my cheeks. But Jenny, perfectly self-possessed, gave him a sharp and mocking reply, and when she jumped into my compartment directly afterwards and sat down in the corner opposite, her eyes again wore the triumphant expression which made me feel doubtful. Stuck in the *revers* of her coat, conspicuously displayed was an orchid.

"Whatever made you take a seat right in the front of the train?" she asked quickly and irritably after a searching look at my face. "You knew very well I should only get here by the skin of my teeth."

Half a year spent with Jenny Heysten had incul-

cated wisdom. "Who gave you those flowers?" I asked in my turn with my chilliest school-mistress voice.

I felt rather than saw her blush as she put up her feet on the seat opposite and with tapering fingers, the nails of which she had manicured lately with great care, fiddled with a tiny hole in her silk stocking. But afterwards from under the shadowing hat brim, she glanced up slyly and began to laugh, the pearly unnatural laugh which had irritated me the whole evening in Josette. "As though you don't know that as well as I—duenna!"

"Manders? And why? What reason has that man to give you flowers?"

She laughed triumphantly. "If it gives him pleasure, why shouldn't he?" she bragged with the pride of a flapper at her first conquest. Then she felt in the deep pockets of her coat and fished out a handful of paper-covered sweets which she threw into my lap. "Here you are—from 'him' as well—bought on our way to the station because he knows I'm so mad on them. Hit out from the shoulder with your lecture, you dear old thing, and get it over in case anyone comes in at the next stop."

I was hopelessly off the track once more. Just now in my angry seclusion I had known exactly what I had intended to say—Nico—her parents. How I should as my right exact from her a promise in return for my confidence in the help I had given her. Now I sat gazing at the little heap of sweets in my lap with the paralysing prospect of a Jenny who would only laugh at any of my assertions. For a moment I envied

those women who have always a few disarming tears at their command.

"Jen," I almost begged of her, "listen to me. With all your self-possession and self-confidence, you are after all but an inexperienced child. And he is a subtle Don Juan."

She looked up from a sweet which she was extracting from its sticky wrapping with some difficulty. "Who told you that? How do you know?" she asked with great interest.

"You told me yourself some time ago that first he was with Lena Terburg and then with Nans Verver." Her mouth full, she nodded affirmatively.

"Quite so—*mais ça n'empêche pas le sentiment*, as we say *chez nous*."

"A man of his age and in his position," angrily seeking my words, "to be in love with his pupil—a mere flapper. It's disgraceful!"

The hard triumphant look vanished from Jenny's face and for the first time her laugh sounded natural as she objected.

"But, Greet, the poor thing can't help that any more than I can help liking it. I have never had such lovely flowers given to me before in my whole life. And just fancy, this evening during the interval, he talked to the reporter about me and said it was my first big part, and that they all had great expectations of me at the Little Theatre. And he has promised me some more of the parts in which he and Lena Terburg have acted together; in 'L'Amour Veille,' 'La petite Chocolatière,' and——"

"But, good gracious, child," I burst out, "don't

you understand what the man's driving at? Haven't you learnt yet after all these months what the end of it is when a man with so much influence and power makes a girl dependent on him like that?"

She raised her head with a jerk, and gazing at me coldly with a disdainful curve to her delicate mouth. "You need not put it so nicely," she sneered as she defined the situation in the bluntest of terms. "And because Nans and her companions lend themselves to that sort of thing, you fancy I shall do the same? Perhaps you think I've already done so, that I'm his mistress, and that is why he gave me the part of Josette."

I did not answer. How could I put into words what I feared, I the onlooker knowing Life chiefly from books, gathering from them opinions as to the innocence of maidens and the wickedness of men which I knew coincided very little with the facts and circumstances of the present day. But somehow in spite of her ideas which I thought perverse, her subtle coquetry, the knowledge of life she had just exhibited in the coarsest of terms, Jenny seemed more than ever the child over whom I must watch because she could not see what playing with fire might lead to.

"You old dear," her voice sounded suddenly touched and meek as, popping the last bonbon into her mouth, she sprang from her seat and in a sweet confiding manner sat down next to me. "Listen a moment, Greet. I believe you're quite off the scent. I'm not in love with Manders, not a little bit, but that does not prevent me from thinking it rather fun to have him so gentle and kind when he is with me, to

take so much notice of me and to help me on. You can't imagine how frightfully thoughtful and devoted he is. I never knew a man could be like that in so many little trifles. You see Nico was so different, he was always so certain of me—and that is perhaps why he didn't always bother to prove his love. For instance, Nick would never think of hanging my coat by the fire so that it should be nice and warm when I put it on ; Nick would never have kept an old glove of mine in his note case and he would most certainly never dream of stopping at a shop if he were in a hurry and in danger of losing a train."

"But dearest," I argued, puzzled by this honesty, "that's only in Manders' favour because he's learnt what pleases by acting in so many love parts, and has adapted them to himself in everyday life."

"Of course I know that too," she admitted at once, "that it's all 'business,' and that one really ought to despise a man for knowing exactly how to fascinate a woman in the way she likes best. And yet—yet Greet, it gives you a lovely warm feeling when you've been for so long among people all in love with someone; especially when it's your profession to be always talking about love, to be always thinking about it!"

The train stopped again. A young couple took their seats opposite, their curious attention at once riveted upon Jenny, who straightened her back, stuck her hands in her pockets, and with one leg crossed over the other, exhibited the silk stockings and smart high-heeled shoes which I had bought for the third act of "Josette."

Weeks passed ; the company on tour made a hit with " Josette," and the delicate French comedy was acted all through the country, even upon the primitive stages in Friesland and the most outlying places. There were nights when Jenny did not get to bed before three a.m., and days when she had to hurry away in the morning so as to appear on the boards at Terneuzen or Winschroten that same evening.

It was a new experience through which her youth and spirits carried her. Every now and then she would relate amusing anecdotes of how they had had to put up with and make the best of the cheap performances which often had to be given in tiny halls ; how a red and white linoleum and a pair of wicker chairs had to do duty as *mise-en-scène* for a seaside hotel ; how a tablecloth, an ash tray and three paper roses travelled with them in the property hamper and were requisitioned to represent a luxurious room in the home of a newly-married couple in the third act, while for furniture they had to be satisfied with that provided by the coffee-room at the little hotel, or the farmer's best parlour.

It was my Easter holiday. I had been asked by the editor of a Review to complete a study of Roemer Visscher of which I had published last year an introductory article, and as our housekeeping expenses had risen alarmingly during the last few months, Jenny's increased salary not covering the cost of her costumes by a long way, I greedily seized this opportunity of earning something extra, and working at it as hard as I could, had little time for anything else.

I was busily at work early one spring morning when

Jenny, whom I did not expect until the afternoon, entered the room. She said good morning in a dull and listless voice, and, anxious not to lose the thread of a well-turned sentence, I greeted her shortly and went on writing. Some minutes elapsed before I was again really aware of her presence ; the stillness, so utterly unlike her, suddenly struck me and I looked up. She was sitting sideways on a chair, her arm across the back of it, still wearing her coat and holding her hat, a smart model but limp and rain-spotted, in her languid hand, and I noticed that the edge of her coat, her shoes and even her stockings were caked thickly with mud. But it was the vacant stare in her great, dilated eyes, the expression of her white deadly-tired face, which made me exclaim with a fear which as yet I dared not define : " What is it, Jen ? What has happened ? "

She started, and looked at me with a futile attempt at a reassuring smile, her face assuming a grin and her voice a harsh sound as, turning away from my penetrating gaze, she answered : " Nothing. Why should anything have ? "

For one moment I fought my desire to turn round and resume my work, to banish the aversion I again felt to this part of Jenny's life, but at the same time I felt a sting of self-reproach for having forced my thoughts away from the subject for many days simply because it upset me to dwell upon it.

She heaved herself up and tried to slip past me, but I caught her by the hand and a bit of her muddy coat.

" Why won't you tell me all about it, Jen ? "

Her bag fell with a thud to the floor as, sobbing

wildly, she threw herself against me, then slid to the ground, a little heap of human misery. Nothing was left of her self-assurance, her mockery, her condescension. With her weeping face in my lap seeking my aid, she was but a rudderless child, and when she began her halting story her eyes wore the wild desperate expression of a hunted animal.

"I didn't dare to, Greet. I didn't dare to stay alone with him any longer. We had to remain behind again together, the others just managed to catch the last train. Then I ran away from the hotel . . . I wandered about all night . . . part of the time on a seat in the little plantation until very early . . . this morning . . . with the first train. You can't imagine what it was like, Greet . . . I can't myself now I'm telling you about it . . . what it's like when you stay behind together like that after you've acted together . . . had a success together—what it's like when all your senses seem open . . . as though . . . as though they were multiplied, as though you were living everything far stronger, more fiercely than ever before. In the daytime, at rehearsal or sitting opposite him in the train, I was able to see him exactly as he really is, see that he dyes his hair, that half of his anecdotes are lies or camouflaged, how it has become his second nature to say nice things, flattering things about my hair or my clothes, or his joy at being with me. Then I used to think how utterly impossible it would ever be to fall in love with a man like that . . . ever to feel more than gratitude for his kindness in helping me on so well. But late at night, after having acted together the whole evening in a play in which he is the ideal

lover with whom Josette feels so safe, to whom she gives herself so trustfully . . . then it seemed as though I no longer knew how to distinguish the man in the play from the real one . . . as though that feeling of Josette's had become my own."

"I think I understand a bit what you mean," I said, trying to help her with her difficult confession as I stroked her disordered hair, but feeling that this intricate sensuality was utterly strange and repulsive to me. "But listen a moment Jenny, I don't know much about love, but of one thing I am positive, and that is that every woman knows instinctively and clearly whether she is in love with a man or not. If she is not, how can she have so little confidence in herself, be so afraid of her own sensations?"

She got up from her humble attitude and sat with her hands resting upon her knees, staring before her.

"Well," she said at last, "do you know what I believe, Greet—that stage-folk never do feel anything clearly any more. I mean that they seem to lose their own feelings because of those complex ones they have lived through in all their parts, and which they have adopted and made their own. I suppose that is why they are all so often in love, because the atmosphere is so impregnated with it, and that is why no girl thinks it awful to become Manders' mistress. On the contrary, I believe they think there's something abnormal about you if you don't!"

"Oh, but Jenny," I interrupted her indignantly, "they know you are engaged, and if you were to take Lise, Annie or one of your other friends into your confidence ——"

She laughed and explained with worldly wisdom : “ Do you think that you have any friends left, especially women friends, if you get on and Manders gives you the best parts ? Even as it was, they felt me to be an interloper because I belonged to quite a different circle and was engaged to a Jonkheer into the bargain, and as they know that Manders’ love-affairs never last more than six months or so, they are quite satisfied that I also should become one of his victims. Last week when we were playing in Apeldoorn and I knew beforehand that the others would still have time to catch the last train to Arnhem, I asked Marie Hecht to stay behind with me . . . offered to pay her expenses for I know she hates Manders. Do you know what she said ? ‘ If you can’t take care of yourself you ought not to go on the stage.’ That evening Manders had ordered a little supper at the hotel for us two . . . with champagne . . . and I know why he pressed me to drink more all the time he was telling me about his unhappy marriage, about his wife who had always been so cold, who had never in the least understood his artistic temperament. I seized the first opportunity I could to run upstairs and lock myself into my bedroom. I sat on the edge of the bed the whole night after hearing him muttering behind the door, pleading and threatening. And the next day when I had to stand opposite him at rehearsal, and at night when we had to act again together . . . that was the most awful part of it . . . that was when it all began, the hell I have been in for days . . . a week already. He worries me now just as Lena used to, only a thousand times

worse. I don't know exactly what he has told the others, why they are always chattering and giggling now, but it amounts to this : I'm abnormal, unnatural, that I only wear a ring and pretend to be engaged to hide the fact. I can't act any longer when he is standing near me . . . holds me, touches me . . . when I feel his breath on me . . . it paralyses me, makes me forget my words which otherwise I could almost repeat in my dreams. Once or twice I've forgotten part of a phrase, a sentence, several words. That of course happens to everyone occasionally ; you help one another by taking up your cues a bit sooner, and no one in front notices it. But he never helps me any more, but allows a pause like that to last for a second or two, until everyone has observed it and becomes restless. In the first act when I am alone on the stage, my most difficult part, he stands at the wings with Dora Tonkins, laughing and whispering so loudly that I am able to distinguish all he is saying. Now and then I have made a serious blunder, and two days ago Bierman sent for me. He had been in front himself and he threatened to take the part away if I did not do better. I never knew what stage fright was like before, Greet. The evening of " Marieke," the first time I acted at the " Little," the first night of " Josette," were bliss compared with it. Now I feel like a bird bound to a stake about to be shot at, of being delivered over to that man who hates me, who, when he has to kiss me at the end of the performance, presses his lips so greedily upon mine because he knows I am powerless to defend myself."

Her voice had sunk to a whisper at this last and most difficult part of her confession, and the room was full

of a silence heavy with unuttered thoughts. I did not ask why she hadn't told me this before, nor did I avail myself of the easy triumph of an "I told you so," but at last among the chaos of my reflections I found the words which had by degrees grown to be my *leit motiv* at every description of Jenny's experiences. "And what of Nico?"

There was no answer. I saw her hands clasped together the white points of her nails digging into the flesh, and I had to repeat my question more emphatically, before her toneless reply came.

"I have written telling him honestly all about it."

"Good God!" The words escaped me before I knew it.

She defended herself wildly—"Well wasn't I obliged to? Isn't it the first and only thing to be honest when you love one another?"

"And how did he ——?" I persisted in suspense.

The weary movement of her bent shoulders, of her head, which she had been resting in utter weakness against my knees, brought a lump into my throat.

"That's just it Greet. It's four days ago—and two over the time for his usual letter. Have you ever waited for a letter, Greet, upon which your life depended—which did not come? Have you ever woke up in the middle of the night because of that waiting which is like pain, a pain of strain in your body, and then lain awake counting the minutes, the hours, until it is time for the first post? Have you ever stood at the top of the stairs, not daring to go down because

you have heard the postman put something in the box, and you suddenly realize that anything is better, every uncertainty, all the unbearable waiting, than what may be written in it ? ”

It was a sunny day of spring and little white clouds went sailing past the window where we were sitting ; the buzzing of a fly against the warm pane seemed filled with a thousand promises of coming summer.

I drew the child closer to me, my arms round her frail shoulders as though to shield her from all the horror stretching out its clutching hands towards her. “ You shall leave, Jen,” I said, mentally weighing possibilities. “ I won’t let you stay there another day. And I’ll take my holiday now ; we’ll go away somewhere in the country, to Brabant, near Nico’s fort, so that you will be able to see and talk to him, and then you will both forget all this misery and everything will be all right again.”

Her eyes lighted up for a moment, but she sadly shook her head. “ You know I had to sign a contract before accepting the part of Josette, and I should have to pay damages if I broke it. I don’t remember how much, but in any case more than you who are so badly off through me already could possibly afford.”

“ How long is it before that contract expires ? ” I persisted. “ Not more than three months at most.”

“ And what then, Greet. Go home ? Perhaps if Nick . . . yes, if Nick were to come now and say : ‘ It will all be the same again if you’ll only give it up . . . ? Yes, I believe I could do it. Because it’s all so different from what I imagined. At the back of each success, every joy, is so much disappointment and

humiliation. And I know I should never become one of them entirely anyhow. I don't want to, and couldn't if I did. That's just what makes them so furious, and why I always sense enmity under all their friendliness."

I look back upon the days that followed as some of the most miserable of my life. Whenever Jenny was absent, a helpless anxiety drove me out of the house to the theatre where she was rehearsing, making me walk up and down the dismal passage waiting for her ; to the station whenever she had to go on one of those wretched tours, as though my presence could serve any purpose except that of making her ridiculous in the eyes of her fellow-artists. And once or twice I accompanied her to one of those impossible little provincial towns in which they were playing, so as to be with her in the depressing bar-parlour of some primitive hotel, while the others, with Manders in their midst, played poker or piquet bursting out into a salvo of laughter after having put their heads together in mysterious giggling and whispering.

And at every home-coming there was the suspense which we would never acknowledge to one another, which one tried to hide with careless lively chatter—the strain of waiting for the letter which had not yet come !

At last one morning it lay upon the breakfast-table, but with my name upon the familiar blue envelope, not hers. Blessing the accident of Jenny's absence for which a late night was responsible, I tore it open and read :—

“ DEAR MISS SCHEPP,

“ I am writing to ask you as a great favour to break to Jenny the necessity of putting an end to our engagement. Of course I want to do everything that is proper and am quite prepared to wait until she writes to release me herself, but she must see, and in spite of her letter I think she has already done so, that a marriage between us would only lead to disaster. During the last six months, I have sincerely tried to adapt myself to the situation remembering what you said that afternoon of my being far more necessary to her than before, that it was my duty to stick to her. And I always reassured myself with the idea that she was safe with you. I presume therefore that you are ignorant of what has occurred between her and Manders. It seems to me that it might be as well, as an enlightenment for your naïve optimism and faith in human strength of character, if you were to ask her to tell you all about it. No man would dare to behave in that way to any young girl unless she had encouraged or at least not discouraged him, and if, as Jenny declares, such incidents are an unavoidable part of the profession, then I am afraid I cannot possibly tolerate that profession in connection with my love. You will probably consider this narrow and conventional and call me a Philistine; then please use your influence with Jenny to convince her that I should never be satisfactory as the husband of an artist. I had asked for leave, I wanted to come to Amsterdam to give her another chance of making a choice, but after all did not dare, being afraid I should once more yield to your combined arguments, that close to her I should not have

the courage to break it off, and in the end should again return to the hell in which I have been existing these last months. Whether you have done her any good in urging her towards this development—because without your influence it would never have gone so far—I venture to doubt. I make no pretension whatever to any knowledge of humanity or worldly wisdom, nor have I the slightest comprehension of Jenny's love for the stage. But I am convinced that without all the grand ideas with which YOU and that Veraart have infected her, she would have ventured upon a more normal and much happier existence as my wife and the mother of my children than the one which, in spite of ambition and success, is now open to her."

It was useless to try and laugh disdainfully at the smooth stilted phrases of this evidently studied composition, to tell myself that for months I had not only foreseen this rupture but had even desired it. It was my vanity, with the knowledge of all I had arranged and sacrificed for Jenny as having been for her ultimate welfare, that was scorched by those deliberate words.

There were whole days when she wrote him long indignant, or passionately imploring letters, only to tear them up again, until at last one evening she handed me a brief, haughty epistle, the "release" for which the "correct" betrothed had been kept waiting. And after that, strangely unaltered, our life went on in the same monotonous way; the tours in the provinces with "Josette," the new play in rehearsal for the summer campaign, new costumes to be tried on, a new part to be studied, and the only change seemed

to be the absence on Mondays of the big blue envelope on the white tablecloth.

I used to ask myself how long this could continue and put off from week to week the painful necessity of a decisive discussion with Jenny in which to explain my straitened means, to make her understand that I could not possibly go on providing for her like this, and to persuade her to effect a reconciliation with her parents, and return home, at all events until the times improved.

And then arrived that other fateful day, that most sunny June morning when Jenny had just been washing out a blouse which she had hung over a line to dry in our room and there suddenly appeared the tall figure of Veraart, an almost unrecognizable Veraart in an immaculate light grey summer suit, patent shoes without a crack and a new soft felt hat, his lined face so beaming, his long mobile form so full of arrogant well-being that I felt convinced of his good news even before his loud resonant voice shouted it into my ears.

“Something is to come of it after all! I have got my new company together and we are to make a beginning in September! At last I have managed to find some capital and people who have faith in me; no not nobility or bigwigs, but a few of the many who have earned millions during the war and are now in their turn anxious to have the opportunity of playing the part of Mæcenæas. Now we can prove that in our country too there is love and reverence for fine serious acting, that the stage once more belongs to us, the actors, and not to decorators, costumiers, and speculators. We will show the scorners and doubters that

we love our own delightful art so much that we are willing to thrust personal gratification into the background. And now I come to you as well, Miss Schepp—Margaret—because I want you and that little girl towards whom I have a promise to fulfil, whom I yesterday saw acting with Manders who is going the right way to send the gift God has given her to the devil. I want her, but I want you much more. During the time when I knew you I always promised myself that if ever anything came of my scheme, you should be my dramaturgist because of your erudition and that clear clever brain of yours, but most of all for something else. Ah, you don't understand, you never knew that you were so often my sounding board, that I so frequently told you of my plans only to find out what you thought about them? How often the quiet smile on your face, the mockery in your clear eyes, put the brake upon my reckless speed, and yet how many times was it your enthusiasm, your faith in my ultimate achievement which helped once more to inspire me with courage and daring after I had come to look upon myself as Don Quichotte—the knight of the melancholy countenance with my retinue of impotent ideals!"

"My dear old boy!" Much moved, I laid my hand upon the bony one grasping my arm. "Isn't it only the stupid vulgar herd to whom Don Quichotte is an object of ridicule? I am perfectly certain that for me he will ever remain the most lovable hero of all."

Yes . . . and now . . . now when after so many years I think about it all, now that I have grown to hate the

stage and am thankful to be so utterly finished with it . . . if he were to come again as he did then to demand my help in the realization of his ideal, to say again with that glad light in his eyes, that enthusiasm in his voice : " Margaret, I want you " . . . yes, I believe I should do just what I did then, shut up my books, push aside my uncorrected proofs, again throw up my safe position, sacrifice my independence and my future to accept the task which he wanted to thrust upon me.

CHAPTER VII

IT was but a modest little building which Veraart after much long and fruitless searching found as a shelter for his new company in a busy but by no means fashionable quarter of Amsterdam, but to which our artistic posters and the rays of the arc-lamp gave a festive appearance above the widely-open doors intended as an entrance for an anxiously waiting crowd outside.

The auditorium was really an old assembly-room, and Marcus Punt, our character actor, persisted in declaring that the cracks and holes in the walls, the torn chair-covers, the cracked gas globes were the result of memorable, historical moments when conservatives and socialists had in this same temple fought out and tried to convince one another of their opinions with more literally striking arguments than those of mere words.

The war seemed to have had the effect of reducing party-hatred and the desire for debate to a minimum, and the little building was the only one in this city where there are so few theatres, obtainable for Veraart's purpose. The proprietor, a silk cap set sideways on his thick head over a gin-red nose, gave full permission to his tenant to decorate and make alterations to his

heart's content, only exacting a promise that they should be of a "respectable nature."

"And you'll see what a lot can be done with a small unpretentious hall like this," said Veraart with the indomitable optimism which helped him over all obstacles, as for the first time Jenny and I walked with him through the hollow space with its dirty decaying walls, its sinking platform. "You will all see that, once we are known every first night announced by us will become the event of the day in Amsterdam, and whenever Neubeck puts up a new poster outside, the place will be black with people jostling one another to read it. Have you seen them yet, Neubeck's posters, how fascinating and suggestive they are?"

And he immediately sprang lightly upon the creaking platform. "Neubeck!" he shouted, his voice carrying through the empty hall to the little back door, as he shouted once more: "Neubeck!"

I recognized at once the thin, apparently old, shriveled up little man who came forward with halting footsteps, and when I noticed how Jenny's face betrayed her perturbation, I quickly laid a restraining hand upon her arm. Neubeck was a German who had deserted from the trenches at Ypres a few months ago after having been, in spite of a stiff leg and an internal wound, sent back again to the front. In escaping, the bullet of a sentry had grazed his chin, and the indifferent surgical skill of a country doctor had disfigured his still young face, giving it a fixed grin that made it appear like that of an imbecile. His round black birdlike eyes alone betrayed the fierce passionate life within.

How and where Veraart had picked him up, I had no idea. Neubeck was a stage-designer who had worked before the war for two of the most modern of the German theatres, and Veraart, the everlasting planner, the enthusiast, the optimist had like a magnet attracted him with all those roaming about with great ideas and unfulfilled ideals. In mutilated Dutch, the German immediately began to give explanations.

I was secretly amused at the critical manner with which Jenny listened, at her self-assurance, at the noticeable satisfaction with which she acted for the two men and herself the part of promising young actress, occasionally reviewing with obvious pleasure, her elegant reflection in the green weather-beaten mirrors, while Veraart, as on the evening when he had first made her acquaintance, good-naturedly treated her as the gifted child whom he had discovered and taken under his protection.

"It really is an impossibly tiny theatre," she protested a moment later as we were standing in front of the former platform, above part of which a scaffolding had already been erected. "How could you ever mount a play with a lot of characters, a play like Hamlet say, or King John in such a small space? In the Little Theatre there was barely room for six of us on the stage at once and this is much more shallow."

"The Little Theatre," Veraart gave a sniff of unutterable scorn. "What do they know about architecture in that puppet-show? I can assure you Neubeck's setting for "Hamlet" or "A Winter's Tale," will give the suggestion of illimitable depth. We shut off

the front with half a bow like a Gothic arch, and the playgoers will view our stage as though looking through a wide window."

Apparently fatigued with long standing, the German shuffled restlessly on his deformed leg, the grin upon his disfigured face seemed to deepen, but the eyes with which he glanced first at Veraart and then at me were still full of a merry light. "Delightful person, the Herr Direktor! What an artist, and what a great, good man! And don't you think, *gnädiges Fräulein*, you who know him so much better than I do, that he also possesses the qualities of a leader?"

"A leader?" The question confused my single-mindedness. "You mean a manager? Of course I believe Veraart to have exceptional qualities as one."

"No—no!" The little man tapped angrily with the roll of paper in his hand. "I mean the leader, the commander-in-chief, so to speak, the man who pulls all the strings, and to whom the others have to render absolute obedience."

While Jenny and Veraart had walked on, we had sat down on a couple of rickety chairs, and I answered laughing: "But there's no question of such a thing. Veraart's ideal is just to have absolute equality among all our artists, the same rights and opportunities for each, the purest communism, Mr. Architect."

He rubbed his deformed chin with a nervous movement of his hand. "Communism in the theatre!" he depreciated. "Of course you know that is quite impossible; it's a perfect impossibility for all to have equal rights there. There must be discipline in the

theatre as elsewhere, and one is bound to have a higher position than the other."

"It's possible to work together in freedom as well," I exclaimed sharply. "We Hollanders are a free people and subjection is an abomination to us."

"Yes, yes," he admitted laughing, but with a bitter irony in his voice which I had not expected from his subdued meekness. "You are not the first to tell me that, and apparently to be proud of it. We Germans have learnt to obey those in authority, that is understood; but it must be very difficult to be a stage-manager in your country."

This conversation irritated me beyond measure. During this period of upheaval and race-hatred, one's tendencies involuntarily became chauvinistic.

"But just look at this a moment," Neubeck's voice was again soft and cringing. "This is the poster Veraart mentioned just now." He unrolled the paper he was holding, and black, white and gold dazzled my astonished gaze. The façade of a temple was sketched in a few strong lines, in the centre of which was a wide gate of a striking Gothic design with the slender figure of a youth standing in front of it, his uplifted and yearning hands stretched towards the light which streamed above the portal outside. The design interested me. It was simple, yet striking and suggestive. Then I read not without difficulty the extraordinary elongated block-like letters which pricked my curiosity:

THE HOUSE OF JOY;

"Is that what it is to be called?" I asked in some

trepidation, for I foresaw what an easy target this name would make for the mocking comments of actors, press and playgoers.

"The Herr Direktor wished it," said the German simply, as with loving half-closed eyes he gazed upon the black and gold of his creation, "And it has a beautiful sound that word, Joy. The Herr Direktor explained it to me. It's not the same as our *Freude*, it means far more, something much higher, more exalted. Is there not something of a sacred delight in it?"

However much I might have wished it, my common sense refused to soar upon the wings of this unbridled enthusiasm. Was this little hall with its soiled, damaged walls and rickety chairs, its dismal light filtering through dim panes from above chimneys and roofs, was this primitive little stage to become "The House of Joy," the place of exhibition for all that is great and exalted?

I could see Jenny and Veraart standing before the platform. He was talking with animated gestures, while her enthralled gaze followed the direction to which he was pointing as though conjuring up beautiful images from the bare boards. Now they were both gazing upwards with as much rapture as though they could see the heavens opening above the dirty, grey, cracked ceiling, and then again she was only looking at his face as though its rapt admiration made it quite different from the lined, haggard one which on the day of his return, with a lack of discrimination, which had sharply stabbed me, she had described as already old and ugly. Could he not win whom he would

with his fire and speed, his irresistible power of word and voice, his convincing faith in his ultimate success ? And much moved, I repeated after the little German : “ Yes, it does sound beautiful, ‘ The House of Joy.’ There is something of a sacred delight in it.”

It was a hot dusty day in July when the new company held its first meeting in the still bare and uncomfortable building which was to become our temple of art. The back-ground which was intended to deepen the stage as much as possible, had already been broken into ; with the exception of about a dozen the chairs were gone ; and the walls from which the dirty damaged plaster had been scraped, were already partly painted in a flat warmly-tinted colour-scheme concerning which Neubeck was only too glad to explain his views to anyone willing to listen.

Upon a couple of propped-up tables in the centre of the hall, were exhibited his designs and building-plans. The walls were hung with various scenic studies and a whole series of costume sketches. Close to the door flaunted the black and gold poster displaying the names and characters of the cast in an improbable number of interesting plays, while in front of all these wonderful things, the members of the “ House of Joy ” were grouped, full of animation, like expectant, excited children.

Veraart had not yet come and proud of my new function—to save expense I filled the posts of secretary and administratrix as well as that of dramaturgist *pro tem.*—I introduced myself to those of the company I had not yet met, and as an outsider, the only one

not of "the profession," I allowed myself to be questioned by them with almost suspicious politeness about my work.

I made the acquaintance of the good-natured, jovial Louis Hofland with his physiognomy of a *bon vivant* and his curly youthful-looking head who, after having served three years of management, asked for nothing better than to be "simply a common or garden actor once more," and his wife, the great tragedienne Ida Huysmans, who had gladly resigned her much envied position as manager's wife "to act together with my husband again, to do some real work, not to wear ourselves out listening to disputes, trying to soothe jealousy and argue away grievances." They were standing cosily together, arm in arm like a young couple, looking at the drawings; but over the table her eyes gazed penetratingly at me, while her husband in his gruff voice questioned me about a bit of scenery, apparently too modern to please him, which he stigmatized as "expressionless stuff." He afterwards asked me in a few short sentences business details as to the seating accommodation, heating arrangements and construction of the dressing-rooms, and I was struck by the cool and critical way in which these two great artists examined their future house, the indifference with which they listened to the great plans and drastic changes in direct contrast to the warmly expectant manner with which the others interchanged their eager remarks.

I greeted the famous Karel van Pelt with his voice of bronze and big decorative figure, who had plucked laurels even in Shakespeare's own native land with his

representations of "Macbeth" and "Julius Cæsar," but who in ordinary life seemed as self-conscious as a big child; his wife Florence, sentimental, small, ugly, clinging to his arm, had been taken on by Veraart into the bargain, as by so many managers before him. Next to them, inseparable, tripped the fat Marcus Punt with his satyr-like features and malicious twinkling eyes, who cherished an infatuation for Florence as hopeless as it was incomprehensible.

Then I strolled over to the other end of the hall where upon a heap of planks near the stage sat Violet Dulac, our *ingénue*, a Belgian actress who, thanks to Veraart's instruction, had developed the Flemish of her youth into a charming but almost undetectable accent in Dutch, in which she had been acting for the last two years. In the Hague she had had a great "vogue" because, pretty and young, she had worn with inimitable grace a series of the most wonderful costumes, but Veraart knew her to be capable of better things and expected a great deal of her in classical work. A little group was gathered around her in humble worship, while she wearing a cascade of costly fur upon her frail shoulders in spite of the heat, selected me as audience for her disappointments and disillusiones, pouring forth in a flood of rapid words a series of complaints about managers who were rotters and blackguards, and a play that had proved an "utter frost."

As she spoke, she laughed coquettishly into the eyes of Peter Weve, the juvenile lead with whom she had acted in several plays, calling him continually as witness with a "*n'est ce pas, Peter?*" while Peter, his

long supple form supported by a ladder against which he was leaning listened with a smile just flickering at the corners of his mouth, the smile which all the High School girls as well as those at the Dramatic Academy raved about.

"No one who is not of the profession," he remarked with that blasé air which became him, "can possibly imagine what it is like to have to act night after night in a poor play, to have to portray a character which is simply the emanation from the brain of some "Play Manufacturer." Last year Violet and I acted for ever so long in 'Dotty Dolf,' a rubbishy farce which we actors kicked at from the beginning, but which the general public raved about and roared at. I played the part of the poverty-stricken baron who pretends to be a millionaire and turns the heads of all the girls. I have a drawer full of letters from girls among the audience whose heads were turned by it, haven't I, Violet? In Assen the Commissary of the Queen came up to me—he had been at college with my brother—and asked me to autograph his daughter's album. In Leyden, where I had formerly been a member of their corps, the students hung a huge laurel wreath round my neck. In Utrecht an aristocratic-looking old gentleman caught hold of me and said: 'As you are Dotty Dolf, sir, you are naturally one of us, and I shall feel honoured if you will sup with me to-night at the Pays Bas.'"

We all laughed at the humorous way in which the young actor told his story, and Violet's pearly staccato, the result of long practice, chimed in agreeably; but when Peter Weve, well-satisfied with the impression

produced, had lit a cigarette and strolled away, her large liquid eyes took on a hard expression and she said to me with a sneer: "*C'est ça*. Now you know all about it—that his brother was a fellow-student of the Queen's Commissary—that he has studied at Leyden, and that he is an aristocrat."

"And that all the girls are mad about him," added Nykerk, a sharp fair little Jew, with a malicious glance at Violet.

My eyes followed Peter Weve. I felt interested in this good-looking youth with his haughty yet pleasing manner, and asked: "Is it true then? Does he act under a pseudonym?"

"Under a what?" queried Dorhout, the clever low comedian, with a sniff of his turnip-shaped nose. "Yes. Peter Weve is a pseudonym. His real name is Reest van Gelderen."

"Really?" I cried in surprise, remembering the professor's family of that name with whom I had been acquainted in Gröningen.

But Punt with his hands in his pockets had come up to us, and checked my interest with a sneering: "Yes, and his grand name would be contaminated by appearing upon the programme among our plebeian ones."

"Our names are not going to appear upon the programmes," remarked the well-informed Max Loots. "Only the names of the characters in the play, and then underneath is to be printed: 'Acted by the members of The House of Joy.'"

"Can you understand," asked van Pelt of Punt, "what they all see in that conceited youth? He has

acted one leading part after the other, first with Terwogt and afterwards with Hofland."

"The playgoers like him," said Punt with a grimace of his round satyr's face, and then he turned to me as though he too were particularly anxious to impress me with his superior insight. "You see, Miss Schepp, that is the curse of 'The Profession.' I don't mind them giving me small unimportant parts in a good ensemble; they have to be acted too, although Ibsen knew very well that in a good ensemble there are no minor parts. I am quite satisfied with a small part as long as I am among my equals. But to be put off with rotten stuff while a young ass like that who has only been in the profession a year or two gets all the showy ones ——"

"O, Punt," broke in Violet with her languid little smile and momentarily affected accent which added to the charm of her musical voice. "Believe me, one is best off with the parts one does not act. That's so often been my experience—the part acted by another—which the critics say should have been mine, a part no one else was capable of giving its true value. I have always enjoyed those the most of all."

We all laughed again, and the sound of our laughter was apparently attractive enough to draw by degrees the whole company with the exception of Peter Weve, who, his hands in his pockets and a cigarette between his lips, was bending with wrinkled forehead over the table with the drawings which two young girls, the Benjamins of the company, like all other women under the spell of his reserved courtly manners, were eagerly asking him to explain.

"You at all events have nothing to complain about," observed Max Loots dryly to Violet. He had seated himself at her side upon the planks and was toying lovingly with her costly fur. "I don't believe there's another actress in this country during the last two years who has had such constant success as you."

Van Pelt nudged Nykerk with a glance at Ida Huysmans who was standing near.

But Violet was looking at Loots with the sweet melancholy smile that reminded me so vividly of her big rôles.

"Success," she said. "What does it mean, my dear boy, in a country where you only get really showy parts when you're about fifty or happen to be the wife of an actor-manager? And what is the value of success in a superficial afternoon-tea sort of play, in which the audience takes more interest in your clothes than in your acting? I would rather act in a really fine play once a year than have a success in such parts the whole year through."

"Exactly," added Nykerk enthusiastically. "That's my opinion too."

I intercepted Ida's scornful smile at her husband, and the atmosphere began to oppress me. Every now and then someone had questioned me about Veraart. Where on earth was he? And where could Jenny be?

For several days since she had first visited his house to fetch some books I had lent him, she seemed to have become infatuated with his two children, and I was afraid she might have forgotten the time while taking the fat little boy and the girl, who was a cripple and had to be wheeled about, to the Vondelpark. But just

then a door at the back of the hall creaked, Veraart held it open for Jenny to enter and I was sensible of a mocking scrutiny among those waiting when Peter Weve with slow swinging steps, walked across the hall to meet them.

Veraart, one hand upon the girl's shoulder, the other on that of the slender young man, was evidently introducing them to one another, and I felt at once by the manner in which they shook hands and remained talking animatedly together, that this was a pleasant surprise to them both, that they were conscious of a mutual freemasonry in the midst of all those strangers of whom they took no further notice.

"The Aristocracy," I overheard Ida Huysmans remark with a sneer, while Punt scornfully uttered that other word which to him and his fellow artists expressed so much—"Amateurs," and Max Loots whispered something into Violet's ear which made them both burst out laughing. But at that moment Veraart strode through the hall and stood among his fellow-artists, his face so lit up with enthusiasm and pleasure, his voice so merry and distinct that it rose above the muttered whispers and with one word subdued all that there was of annoyance, jealousy or doubt in our mood and cast over our relaxed countenances once more the spell of joyful expectancy.

"Van Pelt, old chap . . . I'm so delighted to have you among us. . . . Ida, have you seen Hebbel's 'Judith'? It's the play we'll produce after 'Hamlet,' Violet . . . I've been reading a Russian play with a gem of a part in it for you. Do you know, Nykerk, that there's an article in to-day's 'Dagblad' in which your

essay on Vondel is mentioned with great respect ? ” And standing thus with his hand on Dorhout’s shoulder, nodding to Punt at his other side, winking and smiling at me, I guessed that he had promised himself to effect a reconciliation between those two, who had carried on a feud of many years. There was to be no quarrelling in his company. And a few minutes later the three were standing together in animated conversation before the drawings, Veraart glancing from one to the other, occasionally thrusting a gesticulating hand through his hair.

“ Come, children, on with the battle ! ”

He clapped his hands, and Daddy Hofland shouted the words after him in an alarming roar while Nykerk and Punt bent over Violet to raise her, each holding a fragile tulle-covered arm, and Jan Holst, the youngest member of the company, a slim youth with rosy cheeks and a wondering childish expression, politely pushed towards the table the only arm-chair the hall provided for the elderly Marie Hecht who acted aristocratic dames or comic old women as occasion demanded.

“ No, that’s for Lucas,” protested the elderly one uncomfortably, but Lucas caught her by the shoulders with his big bony hands and pushed her gently into the seat of honour. “ Here there’s no master and no chief. We are all equals, Mrs. Hecht, except for you, who are the most important, because you are the eldest of us all.”

The merry voices hummed with pleasant chaff, an arrow-swift interplay of words only to be heard among those for whom words are the instruments upon which

they perform in daily technical intercourse. Marcus Punt's lined satyr's face bent quickly behind Violet and kissed her in the little hollow at the back of her neck from which the fur had slipped, and like a boy enjoyed her startled cry of indignation. It was a large jolly family gathered round the bare deal table, and I, as a member of it, for the first time adopted into the circle from whose stronghold I had hitherto been excluded, felt a warm glow of happiness, and thought it would be a joy to live my life in its midst. Veraart took a seat in the centre ; to the left of him, as his secretary, I had placed in readiness my papers and my attaché case ; the others found chairs for themselves, joking, jostling, and taking their places as it occurred to them. The chair at Veraart's other side was still unoccupied. Jenny was standing beside it, her hand on its back, listening with interest to something which he was explaining to Ida Huysmans who was sitting opposite. Then came Violet, limp from laughing, half-dragged along, half-carried by her two companions. Upon the back of the chair next to Veraart's, she also rested her hand, glittering with jewels, while her wide fur trailed over Jenny's motionless figure. But she suddenly drew back as though startled.

"I'm sorry I didn't know you had reserved this chair," she remarked in her sweet musical voice and with her charming smile.

Jenny started, the wondering attention with which she had been listening fading out of her eyes which had at once become hard and bright. She straightened herself, and as she stepped back, her features had assumed the haughty Heysten expression. .

"I'm sorry," she said with icy politeness and walked slowly past the row of those seated to the further end, whereupon Peter Weve stood up immediately and placed a chair for her between his and that of Max Loots. This little intermezzo, had escaped Veraart, and even while Jenny and Weve were still whispering in mutual understanding, his voice already resounded through the sudden silence.

"Friends, welcome all to this our House of Joy. What we had hoped for in vain, fought for during so many years, has at last come true! Here our victory is to begin, if only in a little theatre upon a primitive little stage. It is here that we will prove to the people what they have almost forgotten—how much beauty and spirituality may emanate from the stage, from a true work of art performed by true artists. For what has brought us here together is not greed for gain, not the desire for personal distinction, nor the gratification of our ambition, but love for our glorious art which we have only too often seen degraded; love for our difficult and delightful profession which is being spoilt by so much that is unworthy. We often grumble and complain, we actors, and then they ask us: 'Why did you choose that profession,' and to that question we all have but one answer: 'We did not choose the profession—the profession chose us.'"

Breathless now was the silence in the bare uncomfortable hall; an emotion that could be felt was mirrored in the faces round the table, in the majestic strength of van Pelt's, the dreamy melancholy of Nykerk's, the classical beauty and quiet self-control of Ida Huysman's and the delicate spirituality of

Violet Dulac's. Upon all these mobile expressive countenances, each with that something indefinable which stamps its seal upon that of the actor, was reflected the enthusiastic, idealistic words of their leader, and each in his or her own way reacted to this call upon what was best in them.

And when towards the end of his discourse he explained on broad lines what his ideal was that there should be no struggle for priority, that each should have equal chances, all should have equal salaries, while a council elected from their midst should solve all problems and settle all grievances, when he had succeeded in convincing them that this was the only way to have harmony in their work because he believed that true art could only be created by people working harmoniously together, Violet's large soulful eyes were full of tears, and Punt with a spontaneous gesture, stretched out his hand across the table to Dorhout who had been his enemy for so many years.

Day in, day out, during two long, hot summer months, "Hamlet," with which we were to open our theatre, was in rehearsal. But the peaceful auditorium, dim and silent, would not be available to the artists until just a week before the performance so that while hammering, sawing, etc., pursued its tedious way under Neubeck's impatient and energetic supervision, the members of the "House of Joy" were obliged to put up with the loft for their rehearsals. It was a low, beamed place in which the big Karel van Pelt could scarcely stand upright, and every morning when I climbed the steep, worn stairs with the manager we

found the artists hot and listless in that stifling sun-baked space, the men in their shirt-sleeves, and the women, even the ever-chilly Violet, in transparent blouses and frocks, while through the open casement floated in, accompanied by the smell of fish or rotting filth, the tumult of the street, the droning of a hurdy-gurdy, the shouts of children, the ringing of tram bells. It seemed to me impossible that the deep significance and exaltation of Hamlet's mysterious atmosphere could ever be evoked here, that imagination would ever be able to win such a victory over reality.

And yet each day the miracle began to evolve, the perspiring, sighing artists to be gradually transformed by some enchantment into princes, kings, heroes and villains, the loft with its beams and coal-dust into a palace, a hall, a vista of steps and terraces.

During the first few weeks, our artists who had not yet formed a cast tried to seek contact with one another in the play about to be produced by reading and discussing it together. We endeavoured to trace the significance of every involved phrase, to find out the mode of life of the characters by means of the old English "Hamlet" which I had borrowed, and to me was allotted the difficult but congenial task of explaining everything that was faulty or obscure in the translation before the others started to learn the complicated and to them often, incomprehensible script.

But there were mornings during those long, hot months of rehearsal when I noticed sullen and dissatisfied faces pass the glass door of the office, and heard how lifeless and lagging were the footsteps

upon the close musty stairs leading to the loft, and knew before closing my books and locking up my typewriter what the humour up there would be like. A sour sort of fun, a chaffing with venomous words which stung as did the flies driven mad by the heat, filling that wooden ridge with their buzzing choir. Sometimes when I went upstairs, while Veraart was still holding his daily inspection with Neubeck of the carpentering and plumbing, I would discover Ida Huysmans, who was to act the Queen, and Florence van Pelt, who had only the part of the Player Queen, in an apparently innocent but in reality spite-laden conversation, or see in the eyes of Punt, who was to be the King, and Dorhout who envied him for it, some of their former hatred, hedging with words as animals sometimes prowl round one another menacingly before reaching the climax in which their rage explodes.

Then I would slip downstairs and disturb Veraart in the midst of his planning and arranging, with the reminder that he was forgetting the time, and as soon as he had closed the door behind him upstairs and thrown his note-book down upon the table, his strong will seemed to expel all petty enmity and rivalry from the magic circle by the force of the imagination with which he always so utterly banished everything trivial and commonplace.

So far the apportioning of the characters seemed to have given no cause for complaint. All had accepted his or her part as the manager and committee, selected from among the artists themselves, had decided, and everyone was apparently satisfied. However the day before the reading, Violet Dulac had knocked at

the door of our office, and put her charming head, crowned by a dream of tulle and ospreys, alluringly through the aperture.

" Lucas, have you a tiny moment to spare for me ? " she pleaded in her sweet voice, and as I rose quickly and placed a chair for her, she threw a hesitating glance at me.

" You may speak quite openly ; I have no secrets from ' this my sister,' he declaimed as Violet sought in her big silk bag for the MS. of her part.

" My dear boy," she pleaded, thrusting it into his hand, " don't give me that big part. Give it to Ida ! She's much more important than I am. Of course I know that idea of yours of us all being equals, but my own feeling is up against the fact that this first time I should have a more showy part than one who has played lead in her own company."

I looked up in surprise. My glance intercepted the limpid one of the charming young woman that seemed to ask my support to her entreaty. But Veraart walked round the table : reopened the silk bag with his big fingers, put in the manuscript, and closed Violet's little hands tightly over it.

" *Ma chère princesse*, you remember the first article of our statute—there is to be no appeal from the decision of the Advisory Council."

" Nonsense, Lucas ! Ida's on the committee herself, that's why she couldn't very well object when the choice fell on me. She ought to have the part, and at one word from you ——"

He laughed again, standing astride with his hands in his pockets ; but from the manner in which he thrust

back his elbows, I felt him to be displeased. "I shall not say that word, Violet."

"Do, Lucas—*chéri*." She stood close to him, her jewelled fingers gripping his arm. "Give Ida the Queen. I'm certain she is far better suited for it than I." Then with a sudden change of manner, her large eyes dark with menace, "You must agree to it, Lucas! You must have noticed yourself that Ida is disappointed about it and that's bound to destroy the harmony among us."

He took her measure with his half-closed eyes, then removed her hand from his arm as carefully as if it had been some priceless treasure and in a courtly manner raised it to his lips, "Thank you, Violet, I will reconsider your request. Believe me I am touched by it." Quietly he opened the door and let her out.

"Of course you'll do it?" I surmised, with emphasis, because I could feel his annoyance from the way in which he remained standing silently and brusquely rummaging among his papers. "Do you think," he asked, gazing at me with the same mocking, condescending glance with which Jenny so often made me feel my *naïveté*, "do you really believe that Violet made that proposal out of any love or reverence for her sister-in-art, Ida?"

"Of course I do," I cried, indignantly defending the young woman, recollecting the glorious, liquid, imploring eyes with which she had also asked my help. "How often have you not told us that the curse of the profession is its eternal suspicion, and that in your 'House of Joy' all are to be open-hearted and honest with one another?" I observed my words were making

some impression and continued. "Why should Violet want to give this part to someone else, on the opening night above all, if it were not for the reason she gives?"

He had been pacing up and down the room, but now he stood still and banged with his big fist upon the back of my chair. "Damn it, perhaps you're right! All my theories seem to have become muddled again. For so many years I have known some secret reason to lurk at the bottom of each quasi-noble action of a fellow-artist, have become so accustomed to jealousy and intrigues that it's impossible at one stroke to believe in the disinterestedness of the beautiful but artful Violet. And suddenly thrusting his hand through his hair, as with the other he caught both of mine in a firm grip; "You see now, Margaret, that what I've told you so often is quite true—you are my 'missing link.' You're right, I want you to be right. I'll prove that at least I am not suspicious of my own people. Violet shall have her way, Ida Huysmans shall play the Queen."

How proud, how delightfully touched I used to feel at such moments! How utterly they consoled me for all his incalculable moods of restlessness, surliness and impatience! How they helped me to overcome the enervating strain, the irritation of my clerk's existence.

But upon the warm evening of that same day as Jenny and I were sitting on the balcony of our comfortable rooms in the van Breestraat, she asked: "By the way, Margaret, have you heard anything about some alteration in the cast? That Ida is to have the Queen, and Violet Ophelia, not I?"

“ Violet Ophelia ? ”

“ You know the Committee agreed with Veraart to let me try it, but it was to be taken from me if my rehearsals were not satisfactory. Well, Violet told Loots that Veraart never really meant me to keep it, that he only pretended to give it to me to please you, because of the three posts you fill for one salary, and that in secret he had already promised the Ophelia to Violet.

“ And do you believe it ? ” I burst out indignantly. “ Do you think Lucas capable of such underhand bungling ? ”

Jenny’s delicate fingers were toying with the petunias climbing the rail of our balcony as she raised her pale face, which had again resumed its expression of a primitive Madonna, to the moonlit evening sky, as she wisely explained : “ I learned a long time ago that on the stage you must believe all slanderers. It’s the only way to remain strong.”

“ But not here,” I contradicted her passionately. “ Are you not yet convinced that here everything is to be different from and far better than at the ‘ Little ’ ? That Veraart is honest and would never play up one artist against the other ? ”

With an enigmatic little smile Jenny gazed into my indignantly glowing face.

“ Do you know that I often think, Greet,” she said, “ that you have the same infatuation for Veraart as I used to have for you, a sort of hero-worship, so that you cannot imagine the slightest defect in him. Of course I think he’s a fine actor, a splendid manager and a pleasant, good-natured pal ; but, honest and

upright where the profession is concerned—I'll only believe that if in a year's time I have not found him out to the contrary."

Often when late in the afternoon we left the office where after rehearsal I still had to take down in shorthand from Veraart's dictation innumerable letters, we used to find Lizzie, his wife, waiting for him in the vestibule. Sometimes the German would be standing next to her demonstrating his latest achievements in a flood of words, while she listened with a strained expression upon her fresh commonplace features. She was always neat and pleasant in an immaculate linen frock and plain straw hat, energetic even when a murderous heat arose from the cobbles outside, cheerful even when she had been waiting for hours amid the dust and tumult created by the workmen. And as she walked away with her husband in obvious pride of possession, the German and I would exchange a kindly smile, and Jenny once remarked, gazing after them thoughtfully: "How fond they are of one another, aren't they, Greet? One notices it in their home too. Now that is really a happy marriage!"

The infatuation she had shown for the family had been of short duration. After weeks of early rising to take the little ones for an airing in the Vondelpark before rehearsal, or even to help Lizzie with her preserving, this self-sacrifice had suddenly ceased. And when I once hesitatingly enquired the reason, she had puzzled me by saying: "It's too bourgeois for me."

"Too bourgeois." In my mind I indignantly com-

pared Mrs. Heysten's neglected home with Lizzie's immaculately neat one, and I emphatically defended the young wife.

"Well, yes, of course I know," admitted Jenny reluctantly, "that she is a wonderful manager with so little money and only a day-girl to help her with those sickly infants, and I should admire her and not mind the kids having a rather broad accent or that it always smells of food and paraffin, and that the washing is always hanging from the balcony to dry, if only it had nothing to do with Veraart, were not his home not the reverse side of his life. You see, Greet, I do admire him so enormously. I admire him more and more when he is managing or talking to us about his work. I always think him such a great man, such a true artist when he is on the boards or in here pacing up and down holding forth or gesticulating—always—except in his own home! I know it's absurd and exaggerated of me, but sometimes I feel as though I could hate him when I see him sitting like a parrot on a perch in that narrow overcrowded room under that beaded lampshade, or when he is drinking tea out of a cup with 'A present for Daddy' on it; or tidily scraping up with a match-box the ash which he has upset upon the table-cloth."

I shrugged my shoulders with a laugh, accepting this explanation as one of Jenny's vagaries. My life no longer revolved exclusively about hers. For the first time for many months my own experiences had thrust hers into the background. I was no longer the onlooker, but was myself in the midst of this thrilling interesting life, and all other considerations dwindled

before that one object of helping the artist to realize his ideals, in which I too was a believer.

Sometimes after finishing our work at the office, Veraart would beckon me to accompany him, Lizzie hanging on to his arm, and, as the tallest of us three, regulating the pace, and if he gave a sullen answer or made a disagreeable remark occasionally upon hearing her string of anecdotes about the children, she would smile and wink at me over his head and say in her sweet, jovial way : " As soon as we get home, old man, I'm going to make you lie down on the deck chair on the balcony, and Margaret may only come upstairs on condition of not talking business."

What did the surroundings matter to me, even if they were poor and commonplace? Every time I climbed the steep stairs I was struck by the order, the peace, the silence all arranged for him who was the axis upon which that cramped world revolved. If not in bed, the children would be playing in the kitchen with the day-girl, and sitting next to Veraart's deck chair on the balcony, I wrote the letters we had not had time to finish at the office, and tried to arouse his attention to the ever menacing financial problem of his undertaking. And then after hours of methodical concentrated work, he would suddenly spring up, clap me on the back or seize my head with his big hand and exclaim with an enthusiastic : " Good God, Margaret, what a treasure you are ! Do you think I should ever be able to struggle though that mountain of business without you ? "

And then Lizzie, sitting at the other end of the balcony trying to catch the last streak of daylight to

darn his silk socks, would look up and say in her clear, sweet voice: "Yes, Margaret, come often. When you're not here he only paces up and down worrying about what a lot there is still to be done. He is quite right—you are a treasure."

Afterwards, when I grew to know her better and involuntarily lived through little intimacies with her—the problem of a tradesman who came threatening to the door, the expense of the new treatment which the doctor wanted to try upon the crippled Loutje, a row with the slovenly day-girl who gave notice, saying she could not afford to work for such a poor living—my admiration for Lizzie steadily grew, for her spiritual strength, her cheerfulness, her heroic love which never asked but always gave. And sometimes late in the evening when her soothing voice could be heard mingling with that of a fretful child, or the sound of her movements in the kitchen where she was ironing Veraart's silk shirts or the children's clothes, he would remark thoughtfully, as though defending himself from something unuttered: "What a foolish idea it is that one's wife should be part of one's artistic career! As though that had anything to do with married happiness, as though a chap like me with such incalculable moods of horrible depression were not a million times better off with a bustling, good-tempered being who looks after his home and children, and who remains as perfectly neutral towards his profession as though he were a grocer or a house painter. What more can an artist want than a sweet sociable creature who takes all his moods for what they are, who brings him a fresh cup of tea just as he is contemplating suicide, or shakes

up his cushions with an affectionate hug when he is reproaching himself for having married and brought children into this miserable world."

I certainly was fond of and admired Lizzie Veraart. Yet there were times when he was walking home with dragging footsteps after his enormous concentration, when her clear even voice continuously pouring forth petty occurrences or trifling experiences with the children, her rapid vigorous steps, even her simple frock, plain hat and immaculate cotton gloves, would irritate me unutterably. And once when he was in a bad temper and had spoken harshly to her, I had almost hoped to see her spring up angrily and rush sobbing out of the room. But no, with a sweet compassionate, rather pathetic smile she asked: "Shall I turn your cushions for you again, old chap? Would you like a glass of lemonade?"

And towards the end of this preparatory period, already late in September, when, after frequent postponement, the date of our opening was at last fixed, when we had descended from the hot but comparatively peaceful loft to the auditorium and the rehearsals took place upon the stage amid the hammering, the sawing, the heavy footsteps and shouting of stage-hands, when nothing seemed to progress and one difficulty after another was put before the overworked manager, then Lizzie was the only one to preserve her inviolable calm under all anxieties and obstacles, under Veraart's irritability and my nervousness.

"Of course it will all be ready in time," was her invariable refrain. "Luke has so often attempted something new, and it has always turned out all right,"

and I remember one afternoon when, in despair, we held a consultation with Neubeck and Prins the costumier, who declared that the costumes of the supernumeraries could not possibly be ready in time, Veraart turning to his wife with the bitter appreciation: "Good God, Lizzie, how a person like you without a grain of temperament is to be envied!"

Jenny, who happened to be present, had gazed at the young woman with great, penetrating eyes, as though she had made some fresh discovery about her, and on our walk home together she came to the curious conclusion. "Of course that is why it is such a happy marriage. If she were another artist or had as much temperament as he, they would fight like cat and dog. But how frightfully difficult it must be, Greet, to be the wife of a man like Veraart!"

CHAPTER VIII

ALL day the heavy atmosphere of a threatening thunderstorm had hung over Amsterdam. With the evening the streets had become cooler, but our little theatre seemed to retain within its walls all the heat radiated by that long summer. The dress-rehearsal went on more or less the whole day, and Veraart had been busy until nearly seven o'clock because some of the supernumeraries had not turned up. Now he was devouring the meal which Lizzie's day-girl had just brought in, while below, Neubeck, pathetic as a lame crow, hopped hither and thither upon the stage giving instructions in his hopeless gibberish to the scene-shifters who, as yet inexperienced, had been rendered disobliging by the heat.

There had been no time for many of the artists to go home in the intervals of rehearsal, and in the small overcrowded dressing-rooms they got into one another's way. For such a big cast as Hamlet the space behind the stage seemed scarcely adequate, and Veraart at the end of his resources, had sought shelter in his office.

I gazed in some anxiety at his pale tired face, and in spite of myself, for my temper, too, had suffered during the last few days, I had to laugh at the serious manner in which the hairdresser was trying to fit a wig of long wavy hair above his masticating features. I had put off

to the last moment what I should be obliged to tell him before the curtain was rung up, that the furniture-dealer and the electrician, who had been promised some weeks ago some money on account, and with whom I had had conversations on the 'phone the whole afternoon, had an hour ago sent a sheriff's officer, an individual, hitherto unknown to me, who had with icy politeness put a summons into my hand.

Although the reconstruction of our theatre had been carried out upon a far more modest scale than had at first been contemplated, it nevertheless appeared to be much in excess of our budget. Materials were becoming scarce, prices were soaring so that the things we could not possibly do without had to be bought at a cost far above our means.

And Veraart would merely push aside the sheets of figures which I handed him for perusal, having for the financial aspect of his undertaking neither interest nor comprehension. "Only let us act," was his stock phrase, "and the money will arrange itself." I had to manage as best I could without any help from him, and as I daily struggled with long, incomprehensibly heavy bills, I gradually gained some insight into our finances by establishing a method of book-keeping of my own.

"Margaret, what are you worrying about?" he asked, still eating, while Smook, the old hairdresser, his pock-marked face bent in absorbing interest over the wig, was holding a fair lock between the curlingtongs. "It's jolly peaceful up here to what it is down there, I can tell you!"

The telephone-bell cut off my indignant reply. In

alarm I stood listening to a shrill voice—"The Middag Post . . . no invitation for the dramatic critic. Perhaps the new company was not anxious for criticism by the press?" I stammered an excuse. Veraart had made out the lists of invitations himself. I signalled to him for help. Angrily pushing aside the hairdresser, he snatched the receiver from my hand . . . "Mr. Spoor—Is it you, yourself? But of course we sent you an invitation. Must have been lost in the post. But I'll immediately—Made another appointment already? I am sorry, awfully sorry. I do hope you understand." I caught the receiver which he flung away with an oath. "Rang off, the blighter! Well now I've earned the spite of Mr. Middag Post . . . damn him . . . and it's all my own damned fault, Margaret! I didn't know the fellow's address and forgot to look it up."

He was about to thrust his fingers through his hair, but burst out laughing at Smook's horrified face, and sat down once more upon the chest. "How many years have you worked for the stage, Smook? Forty-seven? Well then, old chap, in three years' time we'll celebrate your golden jubilee here, in the 'House of Joy.'"

At this moment the door was violently flung open, and upon its threshold stood Neubeck, the perspiration streaming from his disfigured face. "Herr Direktor, you must come yourself. They don't understand me. They won't understand me when I tell them in Dutch how to manœuvre that back-cloth." Behind him came the sub-stage manager. "Sir—Mr. Veraart, we have no candles for the play-acting scene. You said you would see to those yourself." And then above the lamentations

of the two was heard the undisturbed, deep voice of the porter, who thrust the brand-new sleeve of his uniform through the doorway. "A telegram for the management—reply paid." Veraart seized the green envelope, tore it open impatiently and, breathing unevenly, handed it to me. "If to-morrow before 3, f 1182-74 not paid"—I felt the blood leave my face. I did not dare to look at him although his laughter rang through the little room, and all the concerned faces, the sub-stage manager's, the German's, the little pock-marked hairdresser's and the dignified porter's relaxed as by magic, and all laughed with him. He was standing in the middle of the room in the purple knee-breeches of his Laertes' costume with a very modern vest above them. Without the least consideration for Smook's work he thrust his fingers through his fair wig, shouting orders in his ringing voice.

"It's all right you chaps. I can stand more than that! I rather enjoy a little set-back of the kind. It's not for nothing that I've performed in all the booths of our Indies! Steeman, you take some white paper, roll it, twist it into points at the top, and stick them in the candelabras. If they won't burn, it's because it wasn't the custom at the court of Denmark. Neubeck, I'll be with you directly, but what the devil were you doing for two years in the German Imperial Army, not to have learnt how to swear at a few stage-hands? Porter you can go, Miss Schepp will 'phone the answer to the telegram."

The door slammed behind the four, the hairdresser having finished his ungrateful task; and instead of the sound of noisy voices, of banging and dragging, which

had mounted from below when the door had been open, this warm space was again permeated with its familiar everyday silence. And as his big figure bent over my chair, I could see, as from behind a mask, anxiety appear upon his still smiling face. "Surely we have sufficient to pay it with, Greet? You know exactly what the state of our exchequer is. Good God! Just imagine if they were to lay an execution on the lot to-morrow!"

He was once more just like a big tactless schoolboy, and I felt that never before had I been so necessary to him as now.

"Yes, there's just about enough left, and in any case I can lend it you in the meantime; but it's only three days to the 1st and then you have to pay the salaries."

He was smiling again already, and stretched himself, as though to ward off with that gesture all his care. "In three days' time, my good creature, we shall have earned any amount. Why by then we shall have played for three nights to full houses. The box-office receipts will come to three times nine hundred and eighty gulden."

"If they are full."

He seized me by the shoulders. "They shall be. You don't mean to tell me that you have any doubt about it? The more obstacles beforehand, the better it goes afterwards. I like fighting my way through a tempest of obstacles; the more there are the better I can overcome them. That is joy, that is to feel oneself alive. In something over half-an-hour, about three-quarters say, we have to ring up, and I have still to make myself

up and do heaps of other things, and yet I know that when I'm standing down there upon the boards, I shall not only be able to do my part, but some power will go out from me which will act as a spur and an inspiration to the others. I shall be under the influence of that high pressure without which I should not be an artist."

While he was talking I had rapidly 'phoned the answer to the telegram and scribbled a note to the bank in which was stored my scanty securities. He had now spread out the contents of his make-up box and put a little mirror in the midst of the disorderly array of brushes, boxes and pots. He drew the lamp, around which mosquitoes were buzzing, towards him so that I could see, clearly illuminated in the glass, the pallor of his haggard face. His own gaze was fixed upon his reflection, and I noticed how rapidly, yet carefully, the big mobile hand glided over the already limp and ageing features, as by degrees the miracle developed before my astonished eyes. The countenance in the glass became young, the forehead appearing higher and whiter in its frame of loose fair hair; younger the sharp-lined mouth to which was added a small fair moustache, while the eyes began to glow and glitter under the pencil outlining eyebrows and lashes.

Young and heroic seemed the figure in its close-fitting tunic, and the man in the glass, mysteriously changed, seemed to have created an enchanted atmosphere around him. It was Laertes, proud and invincible, enflamed with courage and lust for strife, in striking contrast to the vacillating, dreamy Hamlet.

He had crept into another skin and his real self had vanished behind the imaginary one.

"Come on," his own well-known voice at last roused me from my reverie. "We must go down."

He switched off the light, and I opened two case-ments, which during the day we were obliged to keep closed because of the unbearable noises in the street, and let the fresh evening breeze blow upon my heated face. Over the gate below the lantern was already shedding its exuberant rays in a wide circle over the pavement. The unsightly houses fronting the little plantation seemed to have dwindled further into the background. They stood dark and insignificant behind the stream of light from "The House of Joy," now that its portals were opened wide. And figures began to approach across the square. From all the streets they came, stepping into the radiant circle, as though drawn by some magic spell. At first there were only a few, then more and more gathered together in the glowing light and stepped over the threshold between the great wide-open doors.

I could hear Veraart behind me. He, too, leant out of the window at my side, and I felt the hand upon my shoulder tremble. There was something thrilling in the sound of these innumerable moving feet, in the dull murmur of these voices, in the re-union of all these beings from all the lighted streets of this big city, as though drawn by the rays of a single star to one illuminated centre-point. It was only then, as I stood there speechless, that I realized how in the depth of my heart I had doubted, had not dared to believe that they would ever come; "they" whom only the

basely material, or obscene had power to enthrall, "they" who passed over all that was beautiful, exalted or wise, with sightless eyes and bored expressions.

And I heard his moved voice say: "That's how I had dreamt it would be, Margaret; that's how I saw it so many times in imagination, my ideal, which so often I despaired of seeing realized. Isn't it a glorious ambition, Margaret? Do you understand now how delightful it is to be an actor?"

But when I took the seat reserved for me in the stalls, I vainly tried among the buzzing, suffocating crowd to recapture the joyful certainty with which, leaning out of that window together, Veraart and I had inaugurated our great night.

Up there we had felt among the playgoers flocking towards our theatre a sort of spiritual bond leading that heterogeneous multitude to us. But here in the heat which caused them to puff, cough and blow, in the to them unfamiliar, emotional surroundings which they observed either with laughing astonishment or mocking criticism, they had become unrecognizable, incalculable individuals, smart society ladies and gentlemen, men and women, each with his or her own opinion, each expectant of some value in return for the money they had laid out. Their calm indifference, amused interest, or lukewarm anticipation struck me as incomprehensible and, in my exalted mood, as blatant ingratitude.

For who out of the many now grumbling because the curtain remained down ten minutes after the adver-

tised time, had the slightest conception of the great happenings behind that curtain?

On the programmes stating the characters in the play without mentioning the names of the actors and actresses, was a clearly-printed notice: "At the conclusion of each act, as well as at the end of the play, the audience is respectfully requested not to applaud." In front of and behind me, either in incredulous amazement or with mocking comments, the playgoers pointed this sentence out to one another. "They can't prevent that," was the conviction of two fat dames busily fishing chocolates out of a bag with their bejewelled fingers, while next to me an old man, accompanied by a merry young girl, made a bet that if the acting met with his approval, he would jolly well manage to make Veraart and Ida Huysmans appear before the footlights. Were there ten or even five who understood what idealism that request betokened? Surely it ought to have awakened some portion of the audience to the fact that our performance of "Hamlet," which in no way bore any resemblance to "conventional" theatre-craft, was a glorious victory over the old and threadbare, the petrified and lifeless? Or would they all without exception regret the painted wings, the cardboard trees and plaster thrones, all the stage-effects so familiar to them from childhood?

I felt a touch upon my shoulder and, turning round, saw Lizzie Veraart. She was in the row behind me with van Pelt's wife, who was not acting in the play. She smiled at me peacefully and said something about a silk scarf which I had left at their house the evening before.

"Aren't you the slightest bit nervous?" I asked

suddenly with an unreasoning irritation against this imperturbable calm. "Aren't you anxious whether it will be a success or not?"

She raised her eyebrows, as with a self-conscious movement of her work-worn hand, she smoothed her crown of glossy brown hair.

"I don't get excited as easily as you two," she said laconically. "Why should I be nervous? I'm only too thankful that it will all be over to-morrow and that we shall have him to ourselves for a bit. A success? Why of course it'll be. He has had so many successes, in which, however, I and the children have had no pleasure. You know yourself how tired he has been lately whenever he came home, and how every trifle upset him."

I thought of the artist who had just been leaning out of the window with me; of the leader who for so many weeks had devoted himself body and soul to the work about to be produced, and the words which he had once uttered as in self-defence awoke in my memory: "Of course it's not necessary for an artist's wife to be part of his artistic career."

But now the three significant strokes were sounded upon the bronze gong behind the purple velvet curtains, and the silent auditorium became dark as night. The velvet folds were drawn aside and the limelight shed its blue-white rays on to the stage. Behind the false proscenium appeared the battlements of the castle suggestively mysterious, while in front the simplest structure of straight lines created the illusion of an endless perspective of steps and terraces.

Neubeck had made of the small, shallow stage some-

thing bordering upon the miraculous. Even I, who was acquainted with the secret of the arrangement of the blocks and columns, who knew of the difficulties they occasioned the artists at their entrances and exits, underwent this illusion of illimitable distance. Against the greyish-white of the setting glowed the bright, sometimes exceedingly daring colours, each costume creating its own personality, but my gaze became concentrated upon a swaying, childishly fragile figure, an oval face full of anticipation with incredibly slim white fingers toying with flowers, and a voice which seemed to invest the words with mysterious significance.

During the last two months Jenny's affairs had been thrust into the background of my interest. I had left her to Veraart's training; our combined salaries out of which according to the rules of the House of Joy no item of her wardrobe had to be paid, were at present ample for our needs, and in the pride of her independence, the self-consciousness of belonging to the chosen ones gathered around the Leader, she had thrown off the last shred of her subjection to me.

The rehearsals of Ophelia, the part of which had been allotted to her on trial, had at first been the cause of much disenchantment and bitter experience. Veraart in his love for his work was a severe taskmaster and all the little mannerisms which she had learnt from Manders and Lena Terburg were flung aside. More than once had I seen her in tears slipping away to a dark corner of the loft, and at home I had known her to throw her part furiously on the floor crying passionately: "I can't do it like that. It's just the

opposite from how I learned it before. Let him take it away then, if Violet can do it so much better."

But however much Veraart might complain and disapprove, he did not give the part to Violet. He would make Jenny repeat a sentence or a movement ever so many times, and had made her come to his house upon many consecutive evenings to teach her how to recite the difficult verse, and to banish from her voice the shrill unnatural sound which she had acquired with Manders. And how the result must have exceeded his expectations! I could not have explained what it was that made that childish figure so touching, what the enchantment was in the clear, bell-like voice which caused the audience to listen more attentively than to anything which had preceded it.

But while Jenny's "Ophelia" was surprising and touching, quite surpassing all Veraart's expectations, so in the same measure as the play proceeded, did Weve's "Hamlet" fall short of them. Though his acting was in its most minute detail as his manager had taught him, it was wanting in the fervour and spirituality which alone has power to create life upon the stage. I could feel that he was gaining no contact with his audience. He did not "fill" the stage, however excellent his technique, and his words did not sound either thrilling or deeply human, only mysterious and difficult of comprehension.

When the lights in the house went up again, in anxious expectation, I glanced at the faces around me, hoping to read upon them my own emotion and admiration; in suspense I listened, trying to catch some delighted, astonished words. Is it my fancy? There is surely

some irritation among this restless multitude ; a common grievance is being discussed, hot red faces are whispering angrily to one another. And as I listen nervously, I have no difficulty in catching the words tea, beer, lemonade, a clamour of abuse as of a people defrauded of something promised to it.

Good Heavens ! I suddenly remember that the "House of Joy" does not possess the traditional refreshment bar. I observe mouths make movements as do sometimes those of thirsty, sleeping children. I hear the voices of women behind me distinctly whispering in voluptuous desire of ices and soda, while one man is yawning and smacking his lips.

I have no difficulty in collecting shreds and scraps of opinions about the play, for it is as though this one overwhelming grievance has let loose a host of others, and it is "the stage without footlights," "costumes made of cotton," "fauteuils which are too narrow," "the floor which is uncarpeted." Then a voice says: "But the acting's fine, though," a second chimes in, a third adds his meed of praise with equal enthusiasm, and I am seized with a desire to shake hands with these contented ones and have to exercise self-restraint not to nod to them in gratitude for their approval, all at once annihilated by a corpulent grumbler :

"Well, I prefer a little luxury myself to all this extraordinary business on the cheap."

"Margaret !" It is Lizzie's quick whisper. "Did you hear them ? They are all so thirsty and there's nothing to drink. However could you have been such idiots, and on such a hot night, too ? Unpractical creatures that you all are with your exalted ideals."

And then the house is again darkened and the play starts afresh. Slowly but irresistibly the spectators are drawn under its spell. They listen in utter silence, even the cavillers and impatient ones. But for me the enchantment has vanished. I, too, see now that the Queen's dress is of cotton. I notice a crooked fold in the King's mantle and observe that a piece is chipped off one of the columns. I can see the supernumeraries nudging one another at their entrances and exits upon the narrow little stage, and note the careful anxiety with which Hamlet and Laertes measure their paces in the duel so as not to get in one another's way . . . and a panic seizes me as I think this must also be apparent to the playgoers, that it is a sort of battle between them and the players, as between a conjurer and his audience, which is willing to be deceived by his tricks although at the same time it tries to find out how he does them.

The play was over. Upon the white steps of the palace lay the body of the dead Hamlet. Fine, thrilling in its grace, had been his wavering fall and death, and as the velvet curtains were slowly drawn, I felt delighted at the harmonious ending, and expected the playgoers to get up quietly and leave silently without the rending sound of applause and a resuscitated smiling and bowing hero to destroy all illusion.

But after a pause which resembled hesitation, a loud enthusiastic clapping of hands began. The audience kept on applauding with ever-increasing emphasis, began to shout, to stamp louder and louder as though they could thus force apart the motionless curtains. Stage-hands appeared in front, and laid upon the

proscenium a number of wreaths and bouquets, quite a trophy of flowers. This apparently had the effect of driving the audience crazy. The hand-clapping became like a command, as though animated by an obstinate determination not to depart until it had conquered those ungrateful, incomprehensible beings who dared thus to break with tradition.

It lasted a painfully long time, then some of the lights were extinguished—some more—and the house was barely twilit. At last the applause began to diminish—seemed momentarily to flicker up again, then to die out. A single fanatic made a last attempt, then all was still, and soberly the disenchanted playgoers began to move towards the exits feeling more than ever as though they had been done out of something to which they were entitled, something for which they had paid their money and of which they had been defrauded.

I had quite agreed with our manager when he had declared nothing to be so disturbing to the artistic atmosphere as the sound of hand-clapping and foot-stamping at the end of a play, that nothing was such a mockery as the impression left upon the minds of the playgoers by a smiling, bowing actor or actress, yet as I drifted towards the exit in the midst of the astonished, perturbed audience, hearing many sarcastic, sneering remarks, I felt the experiment to have been an utter failure. In spite of myself, my imagination would picture the end of the evening as much more beautiful and impressive if Veraart and the others had stood there taking their calls, happy and grateful as they held their flowers and accepted the plaudits and recognition due to them.

"They dare not," joked one of the critics present, while another important one replied loudly, in the hope of being over heard by a fellow-journalist and having his words quoted in some other paper as pearls of wisdom: "Perhaps they are so convinced of a premature demise that they are already making arrangements for the funeral."

But the house was not entirely deserted before some movement was observable in the motionless curtains. A hand was slipped through . . . a second . . . a bare white arm was stretched towards the heap of flowers. A moment later the curtains were drawn back and the actors pressed forward upon the proscenium, some of them still in their stage-costumes, others already clad for the street. And with a haste and greediness in bitter contrast to the silence of a moment ago, each sought among the wreaths and bouquets, the tribute due to him.

Veraart, leaning against a pillar, with crossed arms, stood silently looking on. The strain had gone from his face, the light from his eyes, and as I saw him thus, a smile full of scorn upon his lined haggard face, I felt as I had never done before for the fighter whose glory it had been to declare that the greater the resistance, the more he was assured of victory. I longed to draw his head towards me and to lay my hand upon his sad despairing eyes.

Sounds of laughter approached and Hofland appeared swinging a huge laurel wreath upon either arm. As a man of experience, he had been the only one not to approve of Neubeck's innovations, and had declared himself against any experiments at our first perfor-

mance ; but in the same way as the others, he now tried to hide his discomfiture under ironical, noisy joking.

" These are for you," he cried, " quite 25 gulden worth of laurels!" He lifted up one of the wreaths and tried to throw it over Veraart's head. But Veraart's hand caught the unwieldy thing in its flight and angrily flung it down, its stiff foliage rustling upon the boards. Hofland still laughed, but there was an envious gleam in his eyes.

" Keep them for yourself," shouted Veraart furiously, " and save them all for to-morrow night. Then so far as I'm concerned you can still make up for the bowing and scraping of which you have been deprived this time."

The stage became gradually deserted, the artists with their trophies having one by one disappeared to their dressing-rooms, and it was some time before I found courage to address the motionless figure left behind.

" Are you really going to let them take their calls to-morrow night, Lucas?"

He gave a harsh mocking laugh. " Of course, and what's more I shall have drinks handed round during the intervals, flowers presented to the ladies, and shall invite the members of the ' Press ' to come behind. Am I satisfied? Of course I am ; so is Hofland. It's only trifles which are still wanting. As a matter of fact, the playgoers won't stand so many innovations. They will have a foyer in which to gossip, and they insist upon seeing us bow because we are there for them, not they for us."

" But the audience did feel some reverence for it. I assure you that at the end . . ."

He gave a rapid glance at my face to see whether my words were not giving the lie to my convictions, snatched the fair wig from his head, and rubbed up his own plastered-down hair.

"At the end? You mean because they applauded until they split their gloves, and lingered long enough to lose the last costly tram home? What did I want then? Why, that they should go away as from a church or a hall where they had been listening to the 'Passion of St. Matthew' . . . silently . . . reverently . . . feeling themselves that there ought to be silence. Is that so absurd? Isn't Hamlet just as thrilling? Hasn't Shakespeare written a Passion quite as great as that of Bach? And have we not performed our work here to-night with as much love and reverence as an orchestra and a choral society? How is it that an audience can sit silently and peacefully at a concert, and yet at the theatre demand gossip, hand-clapping, chocolates and drinks as though it were a cinema or a music-hall?"

"Is he grumbling?" It was Lizzie's voice. "You wouldn't believe it, but he's always like this after a first night, always down and pessimistic even when, as now, he can feel quite sure of a success. That's what happens when you have such wonderful illusions, the reality is certain to fall short in some way or other."

"In some way!" He laughed good-naturedly, and his gaze, which had been wandering towards the dim, empty stage, rested upon the woman at his side as though returning from an endless distance.

Lizzie was holding the fair wig, smoothing its disordered locks with a tenderness which strangely touched

me. "Make haste, won't you, dear," she said persuasively, "I can't wait much longer. Janie is with the children, and I promised her I would be home by half-past eleven."

He stood still with a hard look in his eyes gazing at her as if she were a stranger, seeming to be taking stock of her plain, dark-blue silk frock and the simple scarf covering her hair. "I can't hurry," he said coldly. . . "I have lots of things still to see to . . . several people I must speak to. . . ."

"How long do you think you'll be?" she asked, "I've a little supper at home, salmon and pineapple; and I thought perhaps Margaret and Jenny would come." He thrust his hands into his pockets and threw back his head impatiently, "Margaret and I are both tired," he decided, "and Jenny has probably gone already. You go home to bed, and for God's sake don't wait up for me."

"All right." Bravely subduing her disappointment, she turned round brusquely and hurried towards the exit. But before she had had time to reach it, he was at her side holding her by the shoulders, turning her towards him. I could not hear what he was saying, but I saw him bend over her and kiss the cheek which she held up to him with a childish gesture. I hardly knew whether it was pity, tenderness or a strange sort of shame that made the tears come into my eyes.

It was more than an hour later when I walked past the deserted dressing-rooms towards the still dimly-lighted stage, where I expected to find Veraart. In completing some correspondence in the office, I had

found a telegram I wanted to give him before leaving. The back part of the setting hid the stage from my view, but looking for him between the columns my glance fell upon someone in a dark cloak sitting upon the steps, and as I stood still, listening, I could hear Jenny's deep, vibrating voice, saying: "Something of suggestion . . . well . . . yes, hypnotism, if you care to call it that. Of course you know that book 'Trilby.' There it's unconvincing, exaggerated; and yet . . . yet, I felt to-night that it is possible . . . the power of one soul over another; that it was not I who played the Ophelia like that . . . moving the audience as I did . . . but it was you doing it through me."

There was a pause, and then I could hear Veraart's voice full of an emotion which his mocking words sought to hide.

"So for you, too, as well as for Weve, who reproached me with it just now, my management has been a tyranny."

She was evidently pondering this seriously, because it was after a long pause that she said hesitatingly, as though seeking the words: "Perhaps; because at first I felt as though you were forcing me to do what I was doing, preventing me from putting anything of my own into it. But by degrees it became quite different, and I began to understand why. All the time I was with Manders I used to imitate him or Lena Terburg, perhaps even unconsciously, but these rehearsals were no imitation. When I knew you were in front listening, I could hear my voice becoming deeper, the words more significant, and I discovered gestures and attitudes which I had not thought of the moment before. And

to-night for the first time I felt again as when I acted 'Marieke' for the students. I had quite forgotten that I was acting. . . . I was Ophelia. . . . For the moment I was in love, enraptured, then utterly wretched as though I really were living through it all."

My eyes had become accustomed to the dimness, and could now distinguish them both. They were sitting together upon the white steps, she erect, her entwined fingers round her knees, he with his bowed head supported by his hands, and it was some time before he said sarcastically: "It all sounds very fine, Jenny, but if your Ophelia had proved a failure, you would probably not have viewed my influence through such rose-coloured spectacles, would have been anything but grateful to me."

I could see her hand, a small white spot upon the darkness of his sleeve, and the sound of her voice was like a caress as she asked: "But it was a grand night for you, too . . . because we . . . I mean all of us with perhaps the exception of Weve, felt it to be good . . . that we were acting better than ever before. How is it that you, who ought to be the most satisfied of all, are so discouraged and disappointed?"

"Because I had expected so much more," he said bitterly. "I had felt convinced that to-night would be something unforgettable, and in the end it turned out to be exactly the same as so many other first nights. Much applause, many flowers, a success . . . a night which after a week will be utterly forgotten by most of those present . . . of whom only one or two may perhaps have taken away with them some memory

which may help them to become stronger and happier human beings."

"You told me that night of 'Marieke,'" said the girl softly, after a long pause, "that even those one or two made it worth while to be an actor."

He turned towards her, thrusting his fingers through his hair with a weary gesture, breaking into a bitter little laugh. "Perhaps it was that gospel of mine which made you choose the profession."

"Perhaps," she admitted thoughtfully, "or rather, yes, I am certain of it. Without you, your letters, your influence, I should never have plucked up enough courage. But I know now . . . to-night . . . more positively than ever . . . that it is worth it . . . worth everything . . . the disappointments . . . all that one may have to sacrifice for it. It's the most wonderful thing in the world . . . to be an actress!"

Next day, when Ida, Nykerk and Dorhout were bending over the papers in the little office, as members of the council they came to the conclusion, to which they were chiefly persuaded by the Hoflands, that Veraart himself ought to play Hamlet, doubling it with another part.

"It's the only way to keep the play going," persisted Hofland with the authority due to managerial experience, but Veraart wearily and unwillingly shook his head, saying it would be a serious humiliation for Weve.

"My dear chap," the other remarked, "a stage-manager attempting to uphold such considerations would send his company to the devil in double quick

time. You simply must do it, and as soon as possible, too ! If Weve keeps the title rôle the whole thing will be a frost, and we should certainly have to produce something else which would take at least a fortnight, and in the meantime we should have to close down."

So a notice was sent to the papers, and five days after our first performance, we had a repetition of a first night with Veraart unwillingly playing his show part. There were wreaths for the manager, a sheaf of white roses from an unknown admirer for Jenny, an excessive display of homage for the artists bowing and acknowledging their gratitude at its conclusion, a refreshment buffet in the foyer, and appreciative press-notices.

It was the first time since the initial performance, when we had given away many free seats, that a stream of playgoers again entered the " House of Joy." During the intermediate nights the audience had been sadly below our expectations, and the first of the month, the salaries were paid, not out of the box-office receipts, but with money realized upon my scanty securities.

The way to the box-office had become very familiar to me, and my low-voiced question : " Is it going well ? " was always answered by the same negative shake of the head. They did not come, those finely-clad ladies and gentlemen, at whom Veraart had railed with such scorn. Hofland thought it was too early in the season, Dorhout blamed the play, and van Pelt the theatre as being too out-of-the-way ; but whatever the reason, their absence had left our expensive seats vacant and kept our receipts far below our estimates.

I had never in the whole of my life experienced so many and such constantly recurring cares. As

Veraart's work as manager increased, and he had also to act in new and showy parts, the business administration fell more heavily upon my shoulders, and except for the typist who relieved me of some of my secretarial duties, and Hofland who good-naturedly but with excessive prolixity gave me advice in all difficulties, I had no one to help me.

The cares arising from the financial position and the grievances which came to my ears daily, worried me the more because I kept them from the manager, who in any case could do nothing to obviate them. Then there were cares caused by the war—the paint that peeled, the burners of war-time material that cracked, the supply of coal, bought for the whole winter but used up in a few weeks. And then, arriving home thoroughly done up, I had to attend to the rationing coupons for bread, potatoes, rice, etc. Moreover, although Jenny and I were still in a sisterly manner sharing board and lodging, the former happy, unclouded atmosphere had long since vanished. As I had known her during the few months of her engagement in her parents' house, reserved, carelessly happy, so was she now. With the same meekness with which she had formerly accepted my guidance, rewarding it with such passionate devotion, so she now gave herself up entirely to that of Veraart. For the first time since that morning in summer when Nico's letter had lain upon my table, his bitter reproaches ceased to torment me. It was clear this was the life for which she was predestined, and the talent Veraart was developing in her with such surprising rapidity was apparently worthy of the sacrifice she had made of her love.

It seemed to me that Veraart experimented with

Jenny more than with any of the others. He allotted to her a series of difficult character parts, and the way in which she subjected herself to his teaching without the slightest hesitation seemed to give the man as well as the artist a curious satisfaction. She often had a success, not the easy, worldly success of her early period, but the recognition from those who were most difficult to satisfy of something individual and living in her acting, and her popularity grew in the same proportion as did the jealousy of her fellow-artists. I knew with what fury Florence van Pelt uttered the words "amateurish" and "influence" whenever she spoke about Jenny, and of what intrigues Violet suspected her when the interview with Stella Rovano appeared before hers in our chief paper.

But Jenny was no longer vain and coquettish. Her interest in superficial things seemed to have disappeared, as had also the affected mannerisms with which she had contrived to arouse interest in herself when she displayed effectively a pretty hat or a pair of high-heeled shoes. Her experience with Manders had evidently taught her a lesson, and I knew by her unbending attitude towards the others that by degrees she had resumed the Heysten haughtiness which she seemed to have entirely discarded during her early stage-career. Unless she had some important part to study, I was almost sure to find her absorbed in some serious book. Upon the writing-table, bought out of her first savings, lay Hebbel and Schiller, Plato and Shakespeare, and the strong will that had enabled her when a child to learn so many verses and dramatic fragments was now brought to bear on the classic and romantic literature of the stage for which she

ransacked the second-hand bookshops and stalls.

It was a matter for rejoicing, yet I was surprised to find how I missed the jolly unrestrained merriment of her friends, the ragtimes on the piano which used to welcome my home-coming, the songs to the mandoline, even the love-stories and the gossip that I had learned to accept as a matter of course. Sometimes it all seemed too serious and elderly when Jenny and Lina Steeman sat listening to some treatise which Nykerk had written upon "Evolution in Strindberg's World-Conception," or when, proud of their mutual classical education, she and Weve attempted a translation of the *Maenchini* in the hope of Veraart's producing it as a Mystery play.

Was it but a vague match-making instinct which made me suspect an incipient love between Jenny and the handsome juvenile lead when I noticed the glance with which she followed his easy, swinging stride across the stage, or watched him leaning in one of his careless attitudes against a chair or window? Or was it my own unacknowledged desire to be released from the still pressing responsibility of her future? A talented, ambitious youth, an artist, and, above all, suitable from the Heysten point of view. I was aware of Jenny's underlying passionate sensual tendencies, and notwithstanding the liberal principles I, formerly so prudish, had adopted unwittingly in these stage-surroundings, I should have felt far more comfortable if I knew Jenny to be safely married.

But there were weeks before she appeared in some new part, when she seemed utterly to have forgotten Weve's existence. She would attend rehearsal from its first to its last moment, and then, with one excuse or

the other, she would drag Veraart to our rooms, there to enthrone him in the easiest chair to make him help her to carry out in every detail, his conception of the true spirit of the play.

After the Ophelia and a small part in another play, he had given her that of little Eyolf, and from the night when Lizzie Veraart had witnessed Jenny's thrilling representation of the pathetic crippled lad she, who had formerly come so often with her husband to see us, never came any more, and I only found out the cause when I accidentally mentioned something about it to Veraart. His wife persisted in saying that Jenny had given an exact imitation of their delicate, deformed child, and she was therefore convinced that Jenny was heartless and designing. She had abused their friendship, too, for after not troubling in the slightest about the children during rehearsals of this play, she had again come daily to play with Loutje.

"Do you think so, too?" I asked Veraart. "You must remember that Jenny acted the part in accordance with your instructions."

"Oh, women are often over-sensitive about these things," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

This answer pricked me somewhere in my own womanly feelings, and I retorted sharply: "And artists are often heartless!"

And then he uttered the fierce words which I have remembered ever since.

"And what then? If 'Little Eyolf' moves hundreds to appreciation of its beauty, what does it matter if one person has been hurt by it? Hasn't an artist the right to be heartless, and isn't it weak and cowardly not to dare to brave the consequences?"

CHAPTER IX

I STILL remember quite clearly how I first noticed it. It was in my own room on one of those afternoons when Veraart, after an exhausting rehearsal, had come to us for refuge because his children had the whooping-cough and their fits of coughing made him nervous and restless.

Jenny was standing by the window, for the afternoon light was fading. She was studying "Belinde," which she was translating. She was quite absorbed in it, trying to find an equivalent for the difficult, blank verse. He stood close to her, apparently listening, and the way in which he was gazing down upon her bent head seemed to caress the whole of her childish, fragile figure with something of hunger and yearning which touched me deeply and painfully.

It was as though a search-light pierced my brain ! Had he not seized every opportunity during many weeks to run up our stairs, and in the afternoons after rehearsal or at night after the performance to seek shelter with us because it was so enervating and depressing at home ? How much of his precious time had he not already spent in giving Jenny the lessons I, sitting in my corner, had also sometimes enjoyed, for which he had sometimes left the office an hour earlier than usual while I stayed behind to go on with my

endless work of administration. I had left them together without a grain of suspicion, and I was irritated and tormented by the almost forgotten feeling of being a dupe, yet, in the circumstances, helpless.

"It is very good indeed," he said, pushing his hand under the book so that his fingers touched hers for a moment. "You have a wonderful feeling for rhythm, my child. . . ."

"I think it's so lovely to be able to do it for you," she said in her deep warm voice. "I never thought I could when you asked me . . . and now I can work at it for hours . . . and I really feel it is going to be good. . . ."

Was she herself not yet aware of it, or was this childish, confiding dependence a part she had so often and easily acted already? Surely in the sultry, exotic atmosphere of the stage, it was impossible for the relationship between a man like Veraart and a pretty young girl to remain one of pure friendship.

I remembered how freely Jenny still talked about him, how I had never observed her in the slightest way confused when he rushed into our rooms unexpectedly or when I entered the room and found them together; how at first, when she often visited Lizzie, she used to say: "They are very devoted to one another, aren't they, Greet?" And a short time ago she had even exclaimed in surprise: "Can you understand him going out so often and leaving Lizzie alone with the sick children, when after all he is so fond of them?"

And I in my innocence had felt surprised too, for with my simple ideas of love and marriage, I had thought that a man with his restless and overstrained existence

would have lost desire for adventure, that as a matter of course he would be happy with a wife who worshipped him, in a household arranged entirely for his peace and comfort.

His household—Lizzie, the two ailing children! Weeks ago, when I had last seen the young woman, she had looked pale and thin, with dark lines under her eyes. We only spoke about the cause for her desperate haste to get home—Loutje, who was so weakened by the cough that she could not retain food and was becoming visibly thinner, Bé, whose temperature persisted in rising. And she had scarcely reached her own doorstep before she said: "I wanted to tell you how glad I am, Greet, that you are looking after Luke, that he can take shelter with you, because here it's like a hospital, awful for a man who is useless to help in any way and has to stand looking on. And I know he's so much happier with you than with his so-called comrades."

Restlessly I remembered all this as I sat by the table pretending to read, while these two were still standing by the window, she absorbed in her work, he in her.

For the last ten days Jenny had been acting with him in the "Master Builder," she as the youth-exhaling Hilde, "the younger generation knocking at the door"; and this play in which Veraart had won a triumph many years ago, had become the first great success of the "House of Joy." Night after night the house was sold out, and the "smart set," in a fleet of taxis and limousines, had at last found its way to our distant theatre, thus causing unwonted excitement in the little square.

Veraart was elated, all his disillusion of the last few months dissipated. Nearly all his fading ideals were revived, but after being lauded in exaggerated terms in one of the leading newspapers, it had cost Jenny the last shred of her popularity with her fellow-artists.

Would it prove the much-desired turn of the tide for the "House of Joy"? A month ago we had been forced to reduce the salaries of the company, and the morose humour which immediately resulted from this disagreeable necessity became the signal for the airing of long-standing grievances. The Hoflands blamed Neubeck for his absurd settings upon which so much money had been squandered; Dorhout had said that "a rollicking farce would have bucked it all up like a shot"; van Pelt who, after the King in Hamlet, had only been apportioned two small parts, considered himself thrust into the background for the advancement of a couple of amateurs; Violet counted upon her delicate fingers the number of plays in which Veraart had promised her the leading rôles, but which so far had not been produced.

Without much result, I had tried to soothe, plead with, listen to and give advice to them. Although it seemed unreasonable to blame the "management" when they had selected its members from their own *milieu*, this attitude was not incomprehensible in these uncertain care-stricken times, with living becoming daily more expensive, food alarmingly scarce, in conjunction with an unusually severe winter that necessitated the utmost economy in fuel, so that our theatre, only heated before the evening's performance, was icy cold all day.

Was it possible that a man of Veraart's age, with all those cares and anxieties upon his shoulders, with every moment of his time occupied, could be sufficiently in love to be able to forget all else just like any boy? What ought I to do? How could I best put an end to this hopeless passion? Who better to warn him than I, who cared so much for them both, and who was so entirely without self-interest?

I understood now what had so often astonished and irritated me during the last few weeks, that while difficulties had increased and he had been obliged to relinquish one after the other of his illusions, he should have remained so cheerful, had even conceived daring new plans. And his joy in life was evidenced every now and then when he would stretch out his arms above his head and cry: "Greet, I feel like a boy, as though my life were just beginning and I still had everything in front of me." And then his dreamy absent-mindedness, when he would sit staring at the clouds after trying to attend to the business details which he hated. And then I wondered what they would all do . . . Lizzie, the old Heystens . . . what would the world's judgment be if they two were really openly to love one another? Yet what a fine artist-pair they would make, one inspiring and completing the other! What a full glorious life! What might not Jenny's future be with this man who would know how to awaken all that was deep in her spirit, who would be the flint to strike the spark of her talent into a higher and brighter flame? But I thrust away this train of thought and tried to weigh my double responsibility . . . that towards Jenny which I had undertaken of my own free-will,

and that towards him, for whom above any other being in the world, I desired happiness. . . .

Neubeck was busy limping to and from the office. He had dragged portfolios and boxes from the big property cupboard, and was angrily tearing up papers and packing away others in his attaché case. His disfigured face still wore its imbecile grin, but the merry, twinkling expression had vanished from his eyes ; they looked hard and sombre.

"What do you think of the play which the Herr Direktor is now adding to the repertoire ? " he asked with a mocking intonation in his voice.

"He's doing it to please Violet Dulac," I answered in excuse. "A young poet, a friend of hers, has translated *La Princesse Lointaine* for her."

The German repeated the title with deep contempt, and in the most horrible French. "*Der Rostand*," he railed with great emphasis upon the first syllable, "that rhyming acrobat, that hollow virtuoso, that juggler with his superficial refinement. I am not pleading for the literature of my own country, but how much fine French work is there not still unacted, Maeterlinck, Claudel, Crommelynck and so many others ? "

I shrugged my shoulders. "We cannot afford to take any more risks. As long as we remain so weak financially, we are bound to consider the public taste."

"The public taste ! " he exclaimed sarcastically, "You ought to have heard Veraart about that a year ago. He was going to educate it. It had only been spoilt by greed of gain, speculators, the dramatic

company promoters!" Suddenly banging his fist upon the table, causing the papers to fly in all directions, he stammered with rage: "It's dog's work having anything to do with the stage in Holland, and the idea of a madman to think of elevating it. The Hollanders have no taste, no feeling for art. They condemn beforehand what they don't know, and laugh at what they don't understand, at everything which is different from the everyday and commonplace. In Holland only Revue and Variety have the slightest chance."

I caught fire: "You cannot possibly form any opinion from these few attempts. At present there are factors at work before which all art is powerless. If Veraart's undertaking fails, it's because of the present wretched circumstances. It is those that will be answerable for it."

He took his portfolio under his arm and stretched out his hand in leave-taking. "I have seen others work, *mein fräulein*, and I have known the stage longer than you have. It's not the fault of the times. . . . There are always the two selfsame reasons which help to send a theatrical company to the devil—either want of discipline—or some woman's hand wielding the sceptre."

Half-an-hour later, Hofland was standing on the spot where the little German had poured forth his grievances for the last time. He leant against the table and with a strip from one of Neubeck's torn drawings, lighted the pipe which he smoked all day in defiance of the notices "No smoking," stuck up everywhere.

"Have you heard about Violet?" he asked. "She's got flu', and they're half afraid of pneumonia."

“ And what about the new play ? ” I asked in dismay. “ *La Princesse Lointaine* has already been in rehearsal for a fortnight, and must be produced directly the ‘ Master-builder ’ is withdrawn.”

“ I know,” he said laconically. “ It’s impossible to put off the ‘ Princesse ’ and it’s rotten luck for Violet ; she’s not had a decent part since she’s been here ; but as it has happened it will be a splendid opportunity for Veraart to give Florence van Pelt a part she deserves.”

I laid down my pen, and nervously rubbed my ever chilly hands. I was by this time well acquainted with these apparently good-natured, harmless remarks of Daddy Hofland’s. I understood even better than Veraart that the advice he came to give me almost daily was the sum of the general grievance and annoyance.

“ But, Mr. Hofland,” said I, smiling, “ surely you must admit that Florence with her round shoulders and short arms is hardly the type for a young and beautiful Oriental princess ? ”

“ Well, then, don’t let her be the type for it,” he said sharply, stuffing the tobacco into his pipe with his broad thumb. “ At all events, she’s a clever and conscientious actress who understands her business, who has earned her spurs, which is more than one can say for everybody here.”

I felt the stab. “ I am certain Veraart won’t do it,” said I, with perhaps more triumph in my voice than was wise considering the overstrained atmosphere.

Hofland walked over to the window blotting out with his broad back what little there was of the misty wintry daylight. “ That’s just why I am telling you first,” he

said still good-humouredly. " You have influence over him, and you're sensible enough to know that it never answers when leading artists are continually being superseded by a novice."

The insinuation was more distinct than before, and I sharply took up the challenge.

" As you know quite well, it was Veraart's intention to give the leading part in ' Comrades ' to Florence, and it was only because your wife was so extraordinarily set——"

He turned to me with a jerk, holding his pipe in his uplifted hand like a weapon, as he cried menacingly : " Do you mean to insinuate that it's Ida's fault if the best actresses are pushed into a corner ? I assure you that never in the whole of her experience has my wife had to put up with so many disappointments as here. When I think of all the parts promised her and those she has had——"

" For God's sake never quarrel with Hofland," was one of Veraart's dictates, and I too had been impressed by his experience, his ascendancy over the other artists, so I tried to soothe him with a joke. " Tell me, Daddy Hofland, how did you contrive to keep good friends with all in your company ? "

Then he laughed good-naturedly, his pipe between his teeth, for he really was a jovial good-tempered fellow.

" Keep good friends with them all ! But, my dear young lady, I never tried. On the contrary, I always lived with them upon a war-footing. That's how it ought to be with a manager. It's only on jubilees or such-like festivals that you call an armistice, kiss one

another, carry one another shoulder high. The life of a stage-manager is a dog's life, the worst possible; that of a hangman is agreeable in comparison. And that's been the greatest failing of our friend Lucas, to want to put everyone in his company upon an equality and to imagine that would keep them good friends."

Knocking out the ashes of his pipe against the window-sill, and with a good-natured nod of his leonine head, he walked towards the door reminding me before he closed it behind him: "Don't forget what I told you about Florence. The van Pelts have lots of influence, and the critic of the 'Seinpost' has been grouching for the last six months, saying they are not appreciated at their true worth."

Now, Veraart was not thick-skinned like Hofland, and could not work knowing there were enmity and **opposition** among his artists—ought I to warn him? To all appearances the atmosphere in the "House of Joy" was still friendly and intact. There was still fun and merriment when they assembled for a board-meeting or sat round the table for the reading of a new play, but their dissatisfaction found an outlet whenever two or three gathered together. As a fungoid growth, it shot up between those who were resting, or who thought themselves slighted for someone else, while the insecure financial position and the depressing cold seemed to have a worse effect upon their humour every day.

"Upon my word, she is moping again!" Jovially, Veraart dashed his note-book down upon the table and began to stuff balls of paper and coal-dust into the languidly burning stove. And when I gazed anxiously

at him, expecting to see my own worry reflected upon his face, he burst out laughing. "Good Lord, Margaret, what an undertaker's expression, to be sure! Have they declared us bankrupt, censored the 'Master-builder' as immoral, or has the sword which has been suspended over me for weeks at last fallen—have the stage-hands gone on strike?"

He tore open the envelopes of his letters and hastily read their contents, and as usual after having worried about him, I discovered to my involuntary irritation and astonishment that he was full of care-free liveliness.

"I suppose you have heard about Violet," I remarked bitterly, "that she is very ill, and that there is no question of her being well enough for the first night of *La Princesse Lointaine*?"

"Hofland has been here," he laughed scornfully, "to tell you that I must give the part of Mélussinde to Florence van Pelt?"

"Are you going to?"

His good humour remained undisturbed. "Rather not! I might just as well bury the play. But I know how to pacify old Hof. Instead of playing Juffroye Rudel, he can take his beloved Florence on tour for a month with Strindberg's *Kameraden*."

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

He burst out laughing again. "What immaculate innocence! Do you mean to say you are still ignorant of the idyll being played during the last few weeks between Daddy Hofland and the beautiful Florence van Pelt?"

"Ugh, that old Hofland and Florence, who has grown-up children already! And you approve of such a thing, even help them in it. . . .?"

“Don’t be so prudish, Margaret!” He angrily threw his newspapers on the table. “This is not a reformatory, and I am not a censor of morals. Why should I grudge those two their pleasure?” He began to hum. “‘*Nü einmal blüht im Jahr der Mai, doch am Theater blüht stets die Liebe.*’”

“I am not prudish,” said I, deeply annoyed, “but all of you here who have broken with convention and are always probing into love, passion, and divorce because it’s part of your profession, have lost the power to distinguish a really great love from the trivial, superficial affair which you dignify by the name of passion. As to self-restraint or morality, you don’t even know that it exists!”

I heard my harsh angry words echo in the silence, and could feel the expression of his face, although I did not dare to look at him.

“I assure you I do know, Margaret, how to distinguish a great emotion from a superficial love-affair.”

No allusion had ever been made by either of us to that which I, a daily witness, must surely understand. Did he mean that sentence as an acknowledgment? He came close to me, and rested his hand upon the back of my chair, but his voice sounded quite matter-of-fact again when at length he spoke.

“Don’t worry, Margaret, it will be all right, but I must withdraw the ‘Master-builder’ play in four days’ time when the others go on tour. *La Princesse Loaintaine* is just what we require for this season and it will draw the public.”

“So you don’t consider Florence suitable?”

“Of course not. Why, it would be fool’s play.”

“ Who then ? Do you think after all that Ida—— ”

He thrust his hands into his pockets. “ Ida gets quite enough showy parts. Besides she is too old for this.” There was a pause, then as though arming himself against the objections he anticipated, he blurted out : “ Jenny shall play *La Princesse Lointaine*.”

It seemed to me an age before I was able to say anything, and it was as though a long conversation of unspoken words lay behind us when at last I heard myself say calmly : “ The spirit among our artists is none too good as it is, Lucas. I think you are courting disaster in refusing to take any notice of it. Many are dissatisfied, Peter Weve, Dorhout, van Pelt. Do you think it sensible to set Ida and Florence against you, too, by passing them over ? ”

“ Jenny shall play *Mélussinde*,” he repeated, as though he had not heard me. “ She’ll make something fine of it, more beautiful and touching than anything she has yet done. I can see it all in my mind’s eye, the frail, little figure . . . an exotic princess still almost a child yet with something indescribably royal in her bearing.”

“ I thought you did not care for Rostand ? ” I said calmly and quietly. “ You called it soppy romanticism when Violet first brought you the translation, and asked you to give it a place in the repertoire to please her.”

He laughed a little self-consciously. “ So I did, I do still, some of it, at least. The theme of the play is beautiful, of course, but the unfortunate part of it is that the Frenchman’s marvellous skill has disfigured its primitive mediævalism with refined modern accen-

tuation, so that his crusaders as well as the Eastern princess talk like Parisian *boulevardiers*. With Jenny as Mélussinde and myself as Juffroye Rudel, I see it all differently, with endless possibilities. . . .”

“ Yourself as Rudel? But you can’t suddenly deprive Hofland of the part, when he has already been rehearsing it for a fortnight. . . .”

“ Jenny will only be able to act it with me. Together we shall bring out all that is beautiful, all the sentiment which, in spite of its superficiality and swagger, it undoubtedly possesses. Why should I not attempt it with Jenny? In each of her parts, Ophelia, little Eyolf, in Strindberg’s *Easter*, I have reached more with her than I ever dared to expect because I have the power of forcing her to do it as I feel it. Her acting has always been wonderfully pure and beautiful.”

“ Does she know? Have you told her already? ”

“ I sent a message to your place. There’s not a moment to be lost. In ten or at most twelve days time we must open with it. I told Veerman to say she must come down here at once.”

I bent over the typewriter again and sought in rapid tapping distraction for my worried thoughts. What ought I to do? How could I prevent it? And what at the bottom of my heart did I really wish? I did not even hear the door open, but the jerk with which Veraart pushed back his chair made me look up to see Jenny standing in front of him, breathless, with deeply-flushed cheeks caused by the haste with which she had come.

“ Is it true? ” she panted, “ is it true, that Violet is ill and that I—I——”

He did not answer at once, but stared, stared as though he would draw her towards him with his passionate yearning; his eyes, filled with hunger, seemed to be in contact with every part of her. I had never known that a man could look at a woman like that. Then he stretched out his hand to her hesitatingly with the timidity of a youth.

"Do you still remember," he said, bending down to her, "what I told you that night of the students' performance, how you would one day achieve something, how we should act leading parts together?"

There were tears of joy in her eyes. Gently he drew her towards him; neither of them giving a thought to me, sitting motionless in my corner. "Dare you attempt it, Jenny—little Jenny?" he asked in a wonderfully soft tender voice.

She threw back her head. "With you, I feel I can do anything," and before I had time to realize what she was about, she had bent over his hand and kissed it, while he with a sound between a groan and an oath, jerked himself free.

Between the wings, in the passages, in the cramped space which served as green room, everywhere except in the office upstairs, was anger and defiance. I was conscious of it when, passing by the door of one of the dressing-rooms, I replied to the apparently jovial greeting of two chatting together, or when I was walking through the passages, and eyes seemed to be piercing my back, or when hoarse, angry whispers suddenly ceased at my approach.

Florence van Pelt had returned the part of "Sorismonde," the serving-woman to the Princess. It was

the first open act of defiance, and I knew through Jenny, who had been told by Loots, that a stormy scene had preceded it. With a furious gesture, Veraart threw the MS. down upon the table.

"She can take it or leave it," he cried. "I can easily find a substitute for that round-shouldered, elderly coquette," he bragged.

Jenny, standing by, laughed nervously. "Who, Lucas? Line Steeman is too young and Marie Hecht is much too old."

"Why not Ida? We all have equal chances here. Why shouldn't Ida act a small part for once?"

"You surely won't be foolish enough to lay yourself open to another refusal," I said calmly, aware of the triumphant gleam in Jenny's eyes. "Ida is not likely to accept Florence's despised leavings."

There was an angry frown between his brows. "But she shall," he said, "I don't care a damn for her anger. Neubeck was right . . . I have been much too lenient . . . have let them have their own way far too much."

Jenny laughed again. I felt like shaking her and putting her outside.

"At least call a committee meeting first," I advised him, "and let it decide who shall play the leading part, then at all events you won't have any responsibility in the matter."

"Thank you! Last week that silly ass of a Nykerk, as one of its members, made a disparaging remark about my management, and Punt reproached me with not having produced the plays I had promised him. I don't recognize that council any more. I simply abolish it. They will have to find out once and for all

that I'm the person who provides them with their bread and butter."

When Jenny had gone to give Ida's part to the porter, I remained bending over my letters in silent protest. I should certainly not again expose myself to the risk of being told to mind my own business!

Half an hour later I was sitting next to Veraart, the manager, in the dark auditorium seeing Jenny rehearse upon the dimly-lit stage *La Princesse Lointaine*, and again it was as though he were controlling all those beings talking, moving, and gesticulating over there with all his former power, that he was still able to mould them according to his will, even if when away from the shelter of the wings, they opposed and fought against him.

Yet as the rehearsals of *La Princesse Lointaine* proceeded, I noticed that in these too a change had taken place. Veraart, who had formerly seen the play as a whole, and taken the same interest in every part, seemed now to be merely concerned with Jenny's and his own.

Peter Weve gave an excellent rendering of Bertrand, under whose fatal charm the Princess for a single hour forgets her distant lover. Veraart, the manager, however, with the many little tricks known only to those well-acquainted with stage-rottenness, contrived to keep this Bertrand in the background, thereby aggrandizing his own part and making all else subservient to it and Jenny's.

He strengthened the climax in the last act when Mélussinde comes to fulfil the dying Juffroye Rudel's life's dream. In order to render the pathetic death

scene more effective, he had made reckless cuts in the preceding act, and he forced upon Weve a rendering which was as much at variance with the spirit of the play as with his own original conception of it.

"Mélussinde is not in love with Bertrand. It's only the whim of a child who has been living for months in solitude. No, Jenny, that's too much . . . not so much depth in your caress. . . . Don't draw his head towards you. . . . He makes love to you . . . you only submit. . . ." And a moment afterwards he would spring up, run forward and shout angrily: "Let her go, Weve. . . . Don't stroke his hair, Jenny. I won't have it, d'you hear?"

I felt painful shamed tears in my eyes as I observed the sneering smile upon Peter Weve's lips.

"I am doing it exactly as you told me to when I was rehearsing it with Violet," said the young man, correct and self-controlled as ever. "You can check the indications in Miss Schepp's note-book if you like."

Veraart shrugged his shoulders irritably. "That's quite possible. But Violet's rendering was different from Miss Heysten's, so you must alter your indications."

In the background, Ida, in the part of the serving-woman, that had been forced upon her, exchanged a significant look with Marie Hecht, and it seemed to me that I could feel the anger of the apparently submissive Weve, that the oppressive atmosphere in the dark theatre was gradually become suffocatingly full of anger, scorn and hate.

In helpless sorrow, I bent over the note-book on my lap, in which a fortnight ago I had entered each detail

of the *mise-en-scène*. Peter Weve was right ; the pages were black with all the lines which I had been obliged to scratch through and alter. I felt ashamed of the smile I had intercepted, the unuttered comments, ashamed for the artist I had estimated so highly, who had become a besotted slave gambling away his ascendancy because he, already old and a married man, was in love with a child—was recklessly undermining what he had erected with so much care for what, after all, was a foolish chimera, an impossible illusion.

“Greet ! Margaret !” I felt his hand touch mine in the dark. “Did you see ? Did you notice how fine that movement was of hers, that wavering towards the window ? Do you think Violet or Ida could have made such a touching thing of it ? I never even told her . . . never showed her. Every now and then she has some inspiration like that. . . . Ye gods, Margaret, what wonderful possibilities there are in that child. She’ll carry it very far . . . together with me. . . .”

In the House of Joy grew jealousy, hatred and opposition, but at home in our rooms where the spring sun rejoiced exuberantly over the tulips and narcissi which Jenny bought by armfuls, Love blossomed.

I sat in my corner, gazing at the topmost branch of lime just reaching the window because I refused to look over there, from whence came their voices continually repeating verses heavy and sultry with love, from which I felt a repulsion as from the strong scent of hyacinths. I longed to be somewhere alone in a simple white room, to stand before a wide-open window. . . I felt old and weary.

Jenny was "La Princesse Lointaine" all day long . . . when she was bending over her flowers, when with slow languid steps she walked across the room, when she accepted a cup of tea from my hand as though conferring upon me a royal favour. And every afternoon, when rehearsals were ended, Veraart came to go over with her once more the most important scenes in the last act.

During the last months I had witnessed so many and such varied love-scenes, had become so accustomed to the most tender gestures, to hearing the most affecting discussions of human woe, that all former inclination for laughter had long vanished, but in a totally different manner from the acting on the stage, the acting of these two in my room seemed more than ever a travesty of the real thing. He did not trouble to hide it any more, betraying it a thousand times a day by his gaze following her everywhere, by the hands with which he would gently smooth back a stray lock of her hair, touch her shoulder, or the delicate little fingers resting motionless upon the table.

And she? It was useless to try to drive the thought away. She was only acting, acting for her own pleasure, her own enchantment. She was acting love, acting the idol worshipped by the artist, sitting on a stool at his feet, standing by the window to catch the last wave of his hand when he left, smoothing a crease in his coat with a timid tender gesture, allowing her hand to lie lingeringly in his. Irresistibly as the sunflower is drawn to the sun, so was her heart drawn towards the glow of his great longing, and in the sultry atmosphere in which they were together all day

long, she simulated a love which was no more than admiration and gratitude.

For how much longer would he be able to control himself? He was no brute like Manders, but neither was he the spiritual languishing Juffroye Rudel she imagined him to be. There was something fanatical in his optimism, in the manner in which he persisted in ignoring all the anxieties of the moment, gazing towards a glorious future and making all sorts of plans for them both. To me he seemed foolishly fantastic whenever he thrilled her afresh with all his wonderful plans for next season, the parts he intended acting with her, when he would give the bird to the exacting, played-out Ida, Violet and Florence. With her, and the younger members of the company who believed in him, he would inaugurate for the second time his "House of Joy," and thus reap the fulfilment of his visions and ideals.

CHAPTER X

THERE came a pathetic little note from Violet scribbled in pencil. If Veraart would only postpone the first night for a week, she would be able to appear. It was her play, the part for which she had hankered so many years, the part he had promised her when first he engaged her for his company. Her temperature was almost normal already, and she felt herself daily getting stronger ; if he would only give her a little time, she would be well enough.

Veraart stood by the window reading it with the hard impenetrable look upon his face which, like a mask, so often now hid his former varying expression. Then he laid the big scented sheet which so reminded me of Violet's charming voice and rustling silk skirts, upon my desk.

"Write and tell her she must not hurry, that it would be inhuman to let her act such an exhausting part after her serious illness—and that the first night cannot possibly be postponed."

And at the door he turned round a moment to add :
"Please don't say anything about this to Jenny."

I was still seeking words with which to clothe this heartless answer when Hofland entered. I bent lower over my typewriter, defending myself in anticipation from advice which I knew would not be followed.

"Miss Margaret ! They all say you are the only one

who has the slightest influence over Veraart. You try to cool that madman's brain of his. Persuade him to postpone the first night of *La Princesse Lointaine* until Violet is better."

"I have nothing to do with it," I replied, shrugging my shoulders impatiently. "Veraart does not consult me any more about these things, and I don't interfere with what does not concern me."

"You'll both be sorry for it," he prophesied with sudden pathos, "if you persist in carrying this through. Do you three imagine that we are all going to dance to your piping?"

Alarmed at his threatening tone, I looked up, but he had already turned his back and was striding out of the office. This was the last bit of advice I ever received from him.

In the largest of the dressing-rooms which up to now had been reserved for Ida, a costumier with the help of a dresser was trying to adapt to Jenny's much shorter and even more slender form, the costly velvet dress which a few weeks ago had been designed for Violet. Very pale was her little face, as yet devoid of make-up, under the wig of golden hair reaching to her waist. Over the white velvet she was wearing a heavy mantle of some gold stuff sewn with coloured jewels, and upon her forehead a diadem of pearls, long strings of pearls fell over her ears and among the waves of her hair, while a broad golden girdle held the folds of the garment together over her hips.

Lost in thought, she was gazing at her reflection in the long glass, and looking up upon hearing the creaking of the door, she smiled and nodded with the dreamy

haughtiness which had become a habit with her since she had been living the part of *La Princesse Lointaine*. When the costumier had finished and with the dresser had disappeared, the latter with a load of empty boxes and tissue paper, she caught hold of my arm and dragged me to the glass.

"Greet, how do you like it?" she cried in childish rapture. "Aren't I grand? Can you imagine that it is really I. . . I. . . I! Look, Greet, this is how I descend the steps of the palace with the lilies in my hand, and this is how I tread upon the ship over the torn coats of the shepherds kneeling in homage before me! Do you hear the rustling of this heavy gold stuff, of these pearls?"

I plucked up all my courage. "Jen, surely you must feel yourself that you've no right to it. It's Violet's part, it's her frock, her diadem, her pearls. If she were likely to be ill for a very long time it would be different, but she is getting better, and has asked Veraart to postpone the play for another week."

Jenny had listened to me unwillingly, her delicate eyebrows frowning under the heavy head-dress. But there was anxiety in her eyes as she asked impetuously: "When was that? This morning? Does Lucas know about it? D'you know what he said?"

"So far he won't. He knows of course what a dreadful disappointment it would be for you. And that is why the only one who can persuade him to do it is yourself. You must, Jenny! You'll have plenty of chances later on. You must see that it's your moral duty."

She let go my arm, and her harsh derisive laughter

rang through the little recess. "Do you think I'm mad? D'you think Violet would be so self-sacrificing in my place? Haven't they always pushed me into the corner whenever they had a chance? 'Tread or be trodden upon', and fight to keep your position when once you have won it!"

"Perhaps it was like that with Manders," I urged, still trying to persuade her, "but here in the 'House of Joy,' where we all ought to be comrades. . . ."

Again her harsh laugh rang out as she tried the effect of a ring with a gigantic green stone upon her slim forefinger. "Greet, you dear thing, whoever believed in that but you. Perhaps Lucas himself in the beginning . . . and perhaps not even he. For a time we played at being comrades, all equals because the leads thought it a graceful attitude, and the minors naturally had some wonderful expectations. But didn't you really know that even at first when I acted Ophelia, upon which Violet had set her heart, when Dorhout coveted Punt's part, and Nykerk Weve's, that the comradeship had never been anything more than make-believe, a mere farce?"

The bell rang for rehearsal. I could hear Veraart's voice laughingly shouting something to Dorhout, and as I opened the door, Ida Huysmans, arm in arm with Marie Hecht, stood upon the threshold on their way to the stage. "How lovely you look! How well it suits you!" they both cried with warmth and admiration enough to dupe any outsider, and as Jenny in her heavy showy attire walked through the passage, Peter Weve, in apparently innocent merriment, cried: "Place, ladies and gentlemen, vassals and slaves!"

Bow yourselves to the dust before *La Princesse Loingtaine* ! ! ”

And then upon the morning of the dress-rehearsal preceding the first night, came the miserable dénouement. The stage was already set, the curtain still down, the scene painter and the electrician were examining the footlights—for since Neubeck's departure this concession had also been made to the audience which had persisted in its aloof attitude towards the novel and unfamiliar. Veraart in his Juffroye Rudel costume was with the sub-stage-manager taking measurements of the camp-bed for the dying King, which required some raising at the head, and I was surprised as I passed through the auditorium to see that all the artists, including those not acting in the play, were present, and I could hear lively enervating whispers that ceased abruptly at my approach. I was going through the door leading to the stage, when quick footsteps sounded upon the boards, and a tall figure in a long black fur coat stood before the manager.

“ Lucas, here I am ! I'm better. I'm going to act ! ”

He fell back startled. I could see his face grow pale and drawn under his make-up and, as though seeing a ghost, he stared into the white haggard face, the feverishly-bright eyes of Violet Dulac.

“ I am going to act,” repeated the young woman in a fierce hoarse voice, beginning to unbutton her coat. “ I'm going to act because it is expressly stated that an understudy may only appear on condition that the actress to whom the part was previously allotted is unable to be present at the theatre.”

Her aplomb, her calm self-assurance, perhaps also the fixed despair in her pretty eyes, in the otherwise melodious voice, seemed to confuse Veraart. "But, good Lord, Violet, whatever put such an idea into your head? You know . . . you surely understand . . . I told you . . . you must see for yourself. . . ." Vainly he sought for arguments.

The actress looked about her, taking in with a hasty glance the impressive scenery, Veraart's Rudel costume, the inquisitive faces peering from behind the back-cloth.

"You are playing Hofland's part, aren't you? And you were just going to start?" she asked calmly. "Well, you know I only come on in the second act, so that by the time you've finished with the first, I can be dressed and made up."

She turned round and was about to move in the direction of the dressing-rooms, but as though suddenly regaining his senses, he caught her by the arm.

"You're mad," he shouted at her, "I wrote and told you I could not postpone the first night any longer, and therefore it would be impossible for you to act the part. Do you imagine you can force me to do what you want like this? You've been ill, you were unable to attend rehearsals . . . so someone else had to take your place."

"I know the part," persisted Violet, still mistress of the situation, "I know every line of it, every word of my scenes with you and Weve. I'll prove it to you. If I fall short in any way, I give you full permission . . ."

He shook her by the arm, so that the collar of her fur coat flapped against her face. "You're going home,"

he ordered her roughly. "We don't want any proofs. You can see for yourself that it's a dress rehearsal, and we open to-morrow night with it."

He pushed her away, but she turned round almost falling against him, clinging and begging, with the old coaxing intonation in her hoarse voice.

"Lucas, you know you promised me this part ever so long ago. . . . Gooszen translated the play for me. . . . Lucas, don't you remember your own words last year when you persuaded me to leave Terwogt? Don't you remember all the parts you promised and of which I have not yet . . . not yet acted a single one? Instead I have played in minor parts, have acted as understudy when anyone was ill, done for you what I should have refused to any other manager. . . ."

Her last words were smothered in sobs, and as she stood clinging to him, her face upturned to his, pleading so touchingly in her passionate voice, I saw her for the first time as the great *tragédienne* Veraart had always declared her to be.

Was he faltering? Surely it was impossible to remain unmoved by such pleading? But now I observed that the screen had been drawn aside, and that from behind it, curious excited faces were pushing forward. Had it all been as I had fancied a moment ago . . . arranged, a scene set in advance? Hofland appeared from the wings, strode across the stage, put his hand on Violet's shoulder so that she let go of Veraart, and panting, trembling like a wounded bird, leant against the former's broad chest.

"Of course there's but one solution," said Hofland with apparent calm to the manager, "and that is to let

her try it. Then we can all see whether she is satisfactory, whether her voice is strong enough."

But now Veraart became furious. "No one here has any right to give his opinion. Once more I repeat we give no trials to-day. We act!" And angrily clapping his hands, he shouted: "Scene for the first act, ladies and gentlemen! To your places, van Pelt, Loots and Weve! Call Luitenaar!!"

Violet had turned away. Neither Loots nor Peter Weve made any movement, and for a moment a breathless suspense hung over the brightly-lit stage upon which all these people were standing silently, like figures in some extraordinary pantomime. And then the juvenile lead in his gleaming armour, said in his cool haughty voice: "We all here think Violet is in the right. In the name of all our artists, I ask you whether you will allow her to act this part?"

I noticed the veins on Veraart's forehead swell under his make-up, but before he had time to speak, Punt, with his old heartiness, clapped him on the shoulder. "Come, old chap," he whispered, "don't spoil everything by making a fool of yourself. Remember that in the 'House of Joy,' we were to remain comrades under all circumstances."

Far more than Violet's tears, or Weve's menace, did this appeal touch him! I could see the struggle upon his features.

"Lucas," pleaded Marie Hecht in a trembling voice, "we have often found you troublesome and exacting, but we always believed you to be just."

I held my breath. It would be a cruel disappointment for Jenny, but it would have to be. It could not

be helped. After all, what did this one disappointment to her count against the chance Veraart now had of regaining the lost confidence, the affection of his fellow-artists? And almost before I knew what I was saying, I too, had added my voice to the others with a: "Do give in, Lucas? Violet really has a right to it."

There was another pause when suddenly a rustling made everyone look up. Jenny had made her entrance upon the scene. She appeared unnaturally tall in the trailing mantle, her face fixed like that of some idol under the heavy pearl diadem, while her wide-open eyes, dark with rage, measured glances with the glittering, feverish ones of Violet.

I could see the shock which penetrated Veraart, noticed the wavering vanish from his attitude. He shook off Punt's hand, crossed his arms, and turning to Peter Weve, asked loudly and bitterly: "If I'm not mistaken, this is an ultimatum which you are all putting to me?"

The young actor had also crossed his arms over his breast, and even in the unbearable strain of the moment, I felt as though all this were nothing more than the climax to some stage-drama.

"To tell you the truth," said Weve in his provokingly cool voice, "we've had enough of your despotism. You deluded us with the promise that all here should be on an equal footing, while for months everyone in his or her turn has been kept back and humiliated to please your ——"

He did not utter the searing word. Marie Hecht had quickly interposed by laying her hand over his mouth.

But after a pause which seemed to have lasted hours

a hysterical shriek from Violet rang through the open space. "Your mistress! Why don't you say it, Peter, when we are all perfectly aware of it?" And with a jerk, turning to where Jenny was standing: "That's how you got on with Manders? and why you've got on here, isn't it? That's why you always used to go touring to places where there were no late trains to return by!"

She had withdrawn herself from Hofland's supporting arm, all her languid grace forgotten, as like a fury with clenched fists, she stood before Jenny. At the same moment Veraart stepped in front of her, and I felt touched by the tender protecting gesture with which he put his arm round the girl and drew her head to his shoulder.

"I give you two minutes," he cried to Violet, with apparent calm, but really trembling with suppressed rage, "and if you are not gone by then, I'll call two of the stage-hands to put you out. No one has the right of entrance to rehearsals without the permission of the stage-manager."

But it was precisely his self-controlled manner which seemed to drive Violet mad. "Thief! Thief! that you are!" she screamed to Jenny, and before Veraart had time to stop her, before any of us had realized it, her clutching fingers had hooked themselves into the pearl chains of the diadem, furiously tearing at and then stamping on the rustling beads which fell like a shower.

My first impulse was a cry of angry protest, but suddenly many little almost unnoticed actions and incidents seemed to group themselves together, and

what I had never suspected, never admitted in my inmost thoughts as a possibility, suddenly became a horrible, undeniable certainty. Shyly, almost with repulsion, I gazed at Jenny. Such a different Jenny from the child who had sobbed out in my lap her first bitter experience of a man's passion. She had been acting a comedy all these weeks when she had been the dreaming *Princesse Lointaine*, when she had sat as the meek reverent pupil at Veraart's feet—a comedy of which he had not been, as I had feared, the dupe. Shivering with aversion, I looked back on all those days in which our relationship had remained unchanged, when she had sat opposite me at meals, had kissed me good-night with that terrible secret in her heart, had lived, had worked at my side, while I silly, worldly-foolish woman, had pitied him for his fruitless longing and impotent desire.

And at that moment I hated it all, the stage with its murky intricacies, its sultry atmosphere in which no feeling remained pure, hated the artists, whom I had once thought to be the chosen, for their endless struggle for priority and success, hated their art which I had formerly so loved, their art of self-disguise, of self-creation, because they were such masters of it that acting could no longer be distinguished from reality, and perhaps they themselves no longer knew the difference.

And in my memory, like an enshrined reproach, echoed the bitter question: "Did you think that a young girl could live in such an atmosphere and remain uncontaminated by it?"

Veraart was still standing next to Jenny with his arm

around her. My eyes remained fixed upon the white spot of her make-up against his dark velvet tunic, and again I heard him say with strange calm and self-control: "I give you three minutes, Violet. If by that time you don't go of your own accord, I'll have you put out, and I give full permission to any others wishing to accompany you. I don't keep anyone against his will!"

A few minutes later the stage was cleared, and a threatening unnatural silence hung over the wings.

Hofland had drawn Violet aside, and like a child crying, half-fainting, she had stumbled out, hanging on his arm. Then the incredible happened: the others silently withdrew after them. Ida, Peter Weve, van Pelt, Max Loots, and last of all, with apparent unwillingness, Punt and Marie Hecht, who could scarcely drag herself along. I saw the strain upon Veraart's face as he followed them with his eyes, his trembling lips closed as though forcing himself not to let a single word escape them with which still to try to prevent the irrevocable.

But Jenny suddenly released herself from his sheltering arm: "They have gone! But don't you understand what you have done, Lucas? They're leaving; they won't stay any longer, and we must act all the same. I must play *La Princesse Lointaine*. You promised me yourself . . . you did. . . ."

He caught her by the shoulders and turned her towards him, as one trying to coax a cross, stubborn child, but his smile faded as he gazed into the face which had become like a mask with its angry deeply-dark eyes. "Hush, dear!" he said trying to soothe her.

“ Only wait. . . . We don’t want them, we’ll play ever so many beautiful things together. Let them go. Don’t you worry about them ; I don’t want them as long as I have you. With you I can do anything. Together we have the whole world before us. . . .”

He drew her, still silent and irresponsive, into his arms. In the intense stillness I could hear his whisper, the hoarse sound of his voice, the thrilling, passionate words pleading and commanding at the same time. I slipped away unnoticed, but as I sat at my desk in the empty office, an early picture persisted in arising before me, a picture of Jenny in her parents’ house with her arms around the neck of the spoilt, handsome youth who had treated her like a child, a toy, who had not understood in the least what was rare and deep in her art, but whom she had loved with all her youthful fervour and sincerity. And I felt more convinced than ever that she did not love Lucas like that. She admired him, was grateful to him, but she was only acting, pretending to herself to be in love with him.

That afternoon I undertook the most painful task I had ever faced. After a discussion with Veraart in which we had both avoided any direct allusion to what had occurred, but regarding which his unalterable decision seemed sufficient, and a conversation with Jenny, who had sustained a mocking indifferent attitude, I felt the necessary interview with Lucas’ wife to be the hardest of all. She would have to divorce him, to dissolve a marriage which was one in name only, and then as quickly and quietly as possible he could marry Jenny. For although my moral principles had suffered some eclipse during the last months,

and I had become accustomed to relationships for which I should formerly have felt horror and repulsion, I could not bear the idea of the fall of Jenny, the child I had taken under my protection, for whom I still felt towards her parents some responsibility. I went to Lizzie feeling hard and obstinate, determined to force her to make the sacrifice, to accept the consequences.

Among the gleaming copper and the shining furniture sat the brave young woman, the heroic smile still lingering upon her deathly pale face as, in a faltering voice, she hurriedly asked me a number of questions about the "strike," something of which she had already heard from Hofland. I gave her an account of our interviews with reporters, and the many problems which the sudden closing down of our theatre would give rise to, but she knew as well as I what really was the object of my unusual visit. I could feel the strain under her apparent calm, the dread of what she knew to be coming, until, full of grief for her, I interrupted her.

"You, too, my poor Lizzie, in spite of all your courage and devotion. . . ."

But her work-worn hands, stiffly clasped upon the table, were not outstretched to mine. I could feel her attitude to be hardening as, stiffening her upper lip over teeth no longer white and perfect, with a pathetic attempt at a smile she said: "There's no need to pity me, Margaret. I've so often lived through a crisis like this with Lucas. It's what goes before, the menace, the uncertainty, which is so much worse than the catastrophe itself."

"So you guessed!" I caught with relief at the

implication in her words. "So you did notice that Lucas——"

"Haven't I been married to him for eleven years?" she said with a scornful little laugh. "The time is long past when I believed in his mere friendship for other women, his sympathy and admiration for them because they understood his art, the art he himself so often abuses, but for which he would forget the children, myself—our whole future. And the time is also far distant when I used to lie in bed weeping all night when he was away on tour and had not returned, although he was perhaps only in Harlem or the Hague, or when I once stood by the river and thought that would be the best way to revenge myself upon him and that other woman who was holding him with her seductive body, or perhaps only with her shamelessness. O Margaret, that's so long ago! When you are always worried about money matters, the children, illness, you begin to look upon that other side of marriage in such a different light. In those days I had an old friend, also an actor's wife, who used to discuss these things so sensibly. She used to say: 'Love and passion are part of the profession. It is the merchandise in which they are wholesale dealers. Can you expect a publican never to have a drink, or a coal-merchant to sit in the cold?' She used to explain so clearly to me when I was mad with jealousy that a man may quite easily be unfaithful for a time and yet remain fond of his wife. She would say: 'If it really means such a lot to him, if it's something that as an actor he can't do without, why should I grudge it him?'"

I sat listening in growing astonishment. In the

silence after her emotionless voice had ceased, I began to feel annoyance take the place of the compassion which had possessed me just now, and I could hear my own voice saying sharply and hardly : " I am quite willing to believe that it was so before, simply an infatuation, a brief love-affair, but this is quite different. It is the love of a lifetime. He adores Jenny. He cannot live without her any more."

" But, my dear Margaret, do you imagine that the others were for less than a lifetime either, that those others were not each in their turn just as certain of being the only chosen one, the lifelong companion, the art-sister whom he had always sought and at last found ? "

I shivered. It was as though a grey shadow that choked me hung over the crowded little room. Springing up because sitting opposite one another like this had become unbearable, I burst out with a : " No, no, that's not love, and a woman does not reason like that when she really loves ! If you had ever really loved him, and that alone means a true marriage, you could not talk so cynically about his unfaithfulness, and if you can look at it like this, can take it so calmly when he puts another before you—well, then, give him his freedom, and the chance of beginning a new life."

Lizzie had risen too. With her habitual gesture she patted her crown of smooth brown hair, and then she leant forward over the table towards me. It was quite a different face now, wrung with grief, and her voice was hoarse and trembling.

" And do you imagine that you know what love in marriage is like ? Perhaps you think it's the same as

in books or on the stage . . . that only fervour and passion are beautiful, worth-while, that there is no happiness in sacrifice, in resignation ? ”

“ For you there may be,” I said bitterly, “ but what about him ? What does such a life mean to him ? An artist ought not to marry, he should remain free without responsibilities, so as to be able to fulfil his vocation unburdened by the cares of a household.”

Her fixed calm had abandoned her. She suddenly began to sob uncontrollably, her hands before her face, as do those who are accustomed to control their feelings. And almost in a whisper she pleaded :

“ Don’t I allow him his freedom ? I never follow or question him. I make no scenes. I never reproach him with anything. I knew about this . . . I always know . . . because he’s like a big child in these things and betrays himself a thousand times a day. I already knew about this when perhaps neither he nor you had any inkling of it . . . from the day when she came here to bring him the books . . . when she was so kind to Loutje and Bé. I knew it on that ‘ first night,’ when he would not go home with me, and during all these months when he used to go out because he could not stand the children coughing. I knew it because everything went on so smoothly with his work, because he was able to overcome all obstacles, to put aside all cares . . . because he was again so dreamy, so absent-minded, and bought himself new ties and socks, and wore a buttonhole. And when Hofland came in just now to tell me about this morning, I knew very well that she was the cause . . . as directly you entered this room, I knew what you were going to say ! ”

Where on earth did I find courage for my miserable plea for Jenny on account of her ancient and distinguished family . . . my own heavy responsibility towards her parents . . . their disgrace? Had I really almost felt sorry for Veraart just now, and condemned this poor sobbing creature as cold and cynical, untemperamental and mercenary? Had I in cold blood wished to deprive this entrapped and defenceless being of her last support that I might save Jenny Heysten's honour and patrician name?

"Greet!" she whispered in her hoarse choking voice, "if I believed . . . were certain that this child would make him happy . . . not just for a few months, but was really the woman necessary for the fulfilment of his desires, then I should give him his freedom because I love him so . . . and cannot bear to see him unhappy. But there have been so many already and he always came back to me. A day always arrived when with his head in my lap, he sobbed out his sorrow and misery . . . his hatred for all women . . . his contempt for their falsehood, unfaithfulness and calculation . . . calling me his dearest, truest, sweetest, full of remorse for having neglected and deceived me."

"Do you imagine that you know . . . that it's the same as in books or on the stage?"

These words echoed painfully in my ears as I dragged my weary feet through the spring-warmed streets towards the theatre. Wasn't a marriage far more complex than an onlooker imagined? Had anyone, no matter how close his relationship, the right to judge one of the parties at the expense of the other?

What ought I to do ? Where lay my duty ? Where were the profound principles I had expected to guide my actions ? Sunk in depression, I stood by the closed door of the theatre. Over the great hoarding, which for several days had announced the first night of *La Princesse Lointaine*, white strips were pasted ; only the poster, designed by Veraart, of a beautiful, slim woman in exotic garments bending over a dying knight, had been left undefiled upon the middle door.

I crossed over to the stage entrance, but it was only after repeated ringing that the porter's wife opened to me. An oppressive silence hung over the corridors and dressing-rooms. As I walked across the stage, I caught a glimpse of Peter Weve's sword lying among the scattered properties ; of Juffroye Rudel's creased cloak upon the camp-bed ; while upon the boards, some of them smashed, others still undamaged, gleamed the many pearls of Jenny's diadem. As I entered the office, I saw in the sad light of early evening—*him*, and at the mere sight of his bent head hidden in his big hands, my doubts and hesitations of a moment ago all vanished. It was he I had to help. . . It was a question of his happiness . . . I could not bear to see that cowed look of despair in his eyes.

I sat down on a chair near the table and asked automatically, although I felt like saying something quite different : " No news, I suppose ? "

" Yes," he answered harshly, raising his head with a jerk and pushing aside the pile of papers in front of him, " quite a lot, even since you left. Had you put off your return for an hour longer, you would have discovered the new company installed."

"The new. . . ?"

He laughed cheerlessly at my startled expression.

"Ah! you didn't expect that, did you? . . . that this morning's dramatic scene was only the first act, that others were being promptly rehearsed to follow it? Their plans had been laid weeks, perhaps even months ago. Peter Weve came to make a proposal to me. If I were willing to subject myself to a *Cahier de Charges*, which the gentlemen have instituted, I could remain as stage-manager at my own theatre."

"Peter Weve? How is it that he is all at once master of the show? I should have thought that in such a case, Hofland or van Pelt. . . ."

"Peter Weve is Reest van Gelderen, Margaret. He has many influential connections, far more than a plebeian like myself could ever hope for. He has contrived to interest a number of wealthy Amsterdammers in his venture, and he intends forming a cultured repertory company drawn, like himself, chiefly from the upper classes, which is to produce distinguished work under a Commonwealth supported by the aristocracy."

I detected the bitterness underlying his self-controlled words. "He intends . . . he intends!" I blurted out indignantly. "You would first have to resign your post, and, in any case, you are far and away above him. You . . . we . . . we have connections, too. We must work with all our might to get more . . . so as to get the better of this crisis."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and shrugged his shoulders. "Do you imagine that after these last six months ending in this morning's *dénouement*, there is a single person left with any confidence in me, one

wealthy man who would stake a cent of his money upon any enterprise of mine? And even if there were still anyone crazy enough, do you think I should have the courage to start afresh, that I should have faith in the disinterestedness of any of my fellow-artists, that one of them would relinquish ambition, subdue his vanity, to become merely the servant of his art?"

"You have allowed yourself to be taken by surprise," I continued hopefully. "You'll never make me believe that Violet, the Hoflands, and Max Loots have accepted Peter Weve as manager in that cool way."

"No, that's true. The Hoflands have refused. As to Violet, after the scene of this morning, she has naturally had a relapse and won't be able to act for months. . . ."

"There, you see!" I cried triumphantly. "What is he going to do about his distinguished stage without a leading lady? In the middle of the season he is not very likely to find one. How can he. . . ."

And then I suddenly stopped . . . and knew what the man opposite would not say, but what I could read upon his pale haggard face. It was as though I had been aware all day that this would happen, ever since this morning when I had seen Jenny standing so passively in his arms, yes, even when just now I had pleaded with Lizzie for the love of a lifetime.

"She's quite right," he said after a long pause. It was as though what I had guessed had been discussed between us. "Now she can remain here as *ingénue* and become his leading-lady . . . here, where she has been such a success, where the playgoers know and appreciate her. What can I offer her to balance

that . . . I, an actor out of work, without money, and with a wife and children dependent upon me ? ”

I had a long talk with her, Weve and two of those High Priests . . . his agents. In three days they want to open with *La Princesse Lointaine* . . . with Punt in my part, and Lise Steeman in that of Ida Huysmans.”

I was unable to utter a word . . . not even one of pity, comfort or indignation. Pain and anger drifted through my brain, but mingling with these was also a feeling of freedom as from a heavy burden that had fallen from me.

Veraart had been pacing the room with his hands in his pockets, but now he threw himself down upon the window-seat with his back to the window.

“ You must not think, Margaret,” he began, choosing his words with difficulty, “ that it was an easy decision for her. . . . At first she absolutely refused. . . . She swore to me weeping that she would never . . . that she belonged to me and would follow me wherever I wished. . . . ”

“ And, after that, you yourself—fool that you are ! What is to become of her if you let her go after allowing things to go so far between you ? What will become of her talent with that vain superficial youth and his distinguished theatre ? You could have kept her . . . you have far more influence over her than he will ever have ! ”

He came and stood before me, a momentary flicker of scorn in his eyes.

“ Can’t you understand, you with your keen insight, that that is just why I gave her up ? Oh, I’m not trying to make myself out any better than I am . . .

I was almost tempted to accept alms from Weve, to stay here as his underling only to be with her, so that at least no other . . . But what prevented me at the very moment when she was leaning against me sobbing, trying to force me to use my influence over her to make her decide, was the knowledge that she does not love me . . . not as I want her to . . . not in the only way that is of any value to me. It's the artist she loves, the actor . . . the man who has made her what she is. Much stronger than she herself had any idea of, was her fear, not of losing me, but of losing what was necessary to her art. She never truly loved me, Greet . . . never as she loved that boy, that young sportsman, who left her without a qualm when he discovered that she would not give up her career to please him. That was her first experience of love . . . and afterwards Manders tore down, trod underfoot, all the illusion left in her. Was it then only egotism, calculation, which made her accept me in spite of the difference in our ages, and of my being certainly no handsome seductive youth? Come . . . just consider how such a child learns to know life, to gain experience of love amongst us in our world. 'Samples of Passion,' as a Berlin fellow-artist called it! Had it not been I, it would only have been another, to-day . . . or to-morrow. Who is there among us with any power left to distinguish his own feelings, we who exist day in, day out, by struggling to express borrowed ones? "

I tried to probe what lay hidden behind his apparent self-control. Despair? Perhaps the peace of a scarcely as yet acknowledged feeling of freedom. Was Lizzie right then? Had there been others for whom he had felt as he did for Jenny?

Suddenly he took the chair next to mine and bent persuasively over me. "Why don't you say something, Margaret? You really need not spare me. I know you think me wicked. How should you, with your calm nature, understand what it's like for a man to see his youth slipping away in a marriage which is at best but a compromise? How understand the longing that becomes an obsession to let the tempest rage just once more before it's all gone for ever? To feel once more the glorious happiness that makes you understand why Faust sold his soul?"

So near to me was his head with its untidy bush of hair . . . so near . . . within reach of my trembling hands . . . that I ventured to draw it to me and stroke it. And then his forced calm gave way, his self-convincing words ceased; he slid from his chair to his knees and buried his face in my lap. "Greet," he sobbed, "I love her so. I can't live without her. Without her I'm finished. I've no courage to start afresh . . . no faith . . . I hate my profession. . . . I hate my life."

It all seemed so wonderful to me. . . . It was such a strange precious feeling to caress that bowed head . . . to bend over it for a moment, secretly to kiss the rough hair touching my cheek . . . a feeble joy to utter tender motherly words, realizing cruelly the while that this was the most that life would ever grant me . . . that it was my fate . . . my spinster's scanty lot . . . to stroke bowed heads in my lap, to listen to confessions of lost illusions, to see human beings leave me strengthened and encouraged.

But then I remembered Lizzie, his wife, who asked

no more from love than to be allowed to comfort him, and I realized bitterly that my clumsy tenderness was depriving her of her last consolation.

So I withdrew my hands from his head to lay them on his shoulders, and talked in a bright calm way about what had still to be done in the office, the last difficult task of settling up his affairs.

The last for me, too. With a great feeling of relief, I realized that I, too, now was free, once more at liberty to live my own life. Jenny Heysten had amply demonstrated that she had outgrown my "chaperonage," and I was assuredly not going to subject myself to Peter Weve's authority.

With longing and affection I thought of my books, the many cases of books stored in a depository, and remembered the great peace of the spiritual labour in which for so many years I had found contentment. And I remembered, too, having noticed a few days ago that my peaceful shadowy rooms in the P.C. Hooft Straat, were again to let.

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